

BIDDEN TO THE FEAST

By JACK JONES

"Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following."

G·P·PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK
1938

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CHAPTER I

EARLY ONE MORNING

SHAME, shame,' she muttered, looking down on the man stretched out before the banked-up fire of the one and only living-room. 'Shame, shame,' she sighed, still standing on the bottom-but-one step of the ladder-like staircase leading to the upstairs bedroom.

Ruefully she smiled as she stepped down on to the flagged floor of the living-room, and stepped over her man's body to poke the fire which she banked with damped small-coal each night last thing before going to bed. Then, when she got up at four o'clock every morning bar Sundays, all she had to do was just lighten the fire with the poker and the caked small-coal would crack in a dozen places to allow red flames, edged with smoky blue, to escape from their fiery place of confinement. Nice in the winter it was, but in weather like this it almost smothered her first thing in the morning, and she had to run to open the door to cetch her breath. Had to have the old fire burning through the night to dry the wet and sludgy pit-clothes. . . .

She opened the door and went out to stand on her bit o' baili. Lovely morning again, lovely summer it had been. That day she and her baby had gone to Pontsarn to Zoar Chapel tea-party had been the loveliest day she could remember since before she was married to him lying on the floor in there. She had sat on the grass watching her Joe win two races in the sports held after everybody had

food up there in Pontsarn, where it was so clean, and a woman could breathe. She had wanted to take the boy, Will, to the tea-party, but his father said no, he's finished with such childish nonsense. What did an eleven-year-old man want playing about in tea-parties with women and children? No, he had his living to get. So only herself and her youngest went, for he lying on the floor in there wouldn't let the two gels stay home from their work in the brickyard to go up to lovely Pontsarn on that lovely day to enjoy themselves.

So it was only her and her 'baby', as she called the boy who would be eight year old the Saturday coming, went to the chapel tea-party. Joe, her 'baby', was the youngest of eight, and the only one of the eight to have schooling. He was attending St. David's School, and Ann, his mother, is hoping to put him behind the counter of a shop as soon as he has learnt to read a bit better, and count a bit as well. None of the others have had a day's schooling in a day-school. Owen, who had been driven from home by his father when it became known that he was courting an English girl who couldn't speak a word of Welsh, was killed in the Gethin Pit explosion before he could tell A from B. Llewelyn, who was the eldest alive now, could read a bit of the Welsh Bible, not much, true, for it wasn't by knowing letters he read, but by getting to remember words the Sunday-school teacher had for years been shouting at him. Then he was 'put over the door' by his father when he started courting. Norah Delaney was Irish. Sam followed his brother Llewelyn 'over the door' when his father got to know that he was courting Mike Murphy's daughter, Eileen, on the sly. The only one of the four sons who pleased the father was Elias, who had married a Welsh girl whose name was Miriam Rees.

Those four had in turn left home to get married without a father's blessing in the cases of three of them – not that Elias had more than a growl of consent for picking a Welsh girl for a wife. One of the four, Owen, had gone to his

grave. Then there were four still at home. Two girls, twins, named Megan and Moriah. Now seventeen years old they are, and they have been working seven years since they were ten at the brickyard. Twelve years old they said they were, when they were only ten, the lie they told to get themselves the job their father had sent them to look for, but he, fair play for him as bad as he is, never told them to tell a lie about their ages. Anyway, they did. Will is eleven years old, and for three years now he has been his father's buttery in the pit. Joe, the youngest, was born when Ann, his mother, was nearly forty, and she's soft about him.

In all they are six at home now, the father and mother, the two girls working in the brickyard, the boy working with his father in the pit, and little Joe who is the first of the eight children to be granted the privilege of attending a day-school. His father was against him going there to learn to read English, for Joe's father was bitter against the English and Irish, who had, in his opinion, come to take the bread out of the mouths of the native Welsh. The six now at home sleep in three beds. Two beds in the up-stairs bedroom, with a bit of curtain between them. The mother and father sleep in the one bed, the two boys in the other, smaller bed. The two girls sleep in the down-stairs bedroom, the door of which opens out to the living-room. The house is one of the dozen such houses in the Row.

The father is now stretched out like a log along the floor of the living-room, in his pit-clothes, and still black with yesterday's pit-dirt. Last night he and the boy, Will, were on their way home from the pit about eight o'clock, and he left the boy to drink a pint on strap in The Black Cock, where he stayed until stop-tap at eleven o'clock before coming home as drunk as beer chalked against his next pay could make him. After he had in a swinish way gollupped his taters an' meat he began to smoke. 'Come, wash all over in the water that's in the tub ready for you,'

Ann said. 'When I've finished this pipe o' 'bacco.' But he went to sleep in the arm-chair, the pipe falling out of his mouth to smash on the flag-stoned floor. After that Ann knew that it was no use her bother him — the drunken old fool as he was. She took his boots off to ease his hot feet, which was as much as she could do for him these days. She remembered the time when, with the help of one or the other of the boys now married, she was able to undress him — big as he was — wash him all over, then lug him to bed to rest his bones. But that was long ago — yet not so long ago either. Anyway, it was when she had teeth in her head, flesh on her bones, breath in her body — ay, and hair hanging down to her waist. Nearly thirty years of him had made an old woman of her. Still, she could wash a bit of his face and hands, ay, and those hot feet of his. That will freshen him up a bit. Better do it now, for it will soon be time to call the boy.

She filled water into a bowl from the tub which was under the table. The water in the tub was dirty, for the boy, Will, had washed his pit-dirt off into it the night just gone. Anyway, it would have to do, for water was scarce nearing the end of a dry summer. The one tap in the middle of the Row was only two hours running out of each twenty-four, and the last hour of the running-time was only a thin trickle. The near-by spouts had dried up, so there was only the well half-way up the mountain to [redacted] end on, and there a woman had to wait hours before [redacted] turn came and she could fill her two buckets.

She knelt over the sleeping man to turn his trousers up so as she could untie the knee-strings of his Welsh flannel drawers, and take off his long woollen stockings to wash his feet. 'Phew!' Yes, his feet had always been hot, after a night in stockings over a coating of coal-dust, they were stinking hot. First one foot, then the other, she made sweet and clean. A drop of clean warm water from the kettle she washed his face and hands with as best she could, with him lying there. Yes, he was looking more like her

Rhys now – old fool as he is. Big, bony features. A nose that was a nose, started from far back between sunken and now shuttered eyes to end where it met the heavy moustache which jutted out over his upper lip to conceal his mouth. No wonder he used a ‘moustache-cup’ to drink tea out of. Oh, the length and breadth of him nearly filled what was left of the living-room between the table and the wall. With the bowl with the water in on her hip she stood looking down on him, and she couldn’t help smiling at him the way he looked after the bit of a lick she had given him. She emptied the dirty water back into the tub which was under the table, then gave his heavy and hard pit-boots a soaking with shoe-oil before shaking him. ‘Come on, Rhys.’

‘Uh?’

‘Come on, for it’s ha’-past four.’

He tried to moisten his dry mouth with his tongue as he rose groaning off the stone flags on which he had passed the night. He stood rubbing his eyes and stretching himself for a minute before picking up the earthenware pan containing the household’s supply of drinking-water.

‘That’s all the water we’ve got,’ said Ann.

He put the pan down without drinking, then went, bare-footed as he was, out on to the baili for some fresh air instead. Ann went upstairs to shake young Will, who took some shifting of a morning. ‘Come on, there’s a good boy.’ She waited until Will, after an envious look at little Jo, got out of bed to precede his mother down the stairw~~ay~~.

‘Where’s dad?’ he asked, seating himself on the three-legged stool.

‘There he is out on the baili catching his breath. Dress quick now, so’s to have time for a good breakfast.’

The boy went on dressing, whilst his father outside the door on the baili went on gulping morning air and gobbing all over the place. Presently he went back into the house. Ann had rubbed the hardness out of the feet of the woollen stockings she handed him. He sat on the three-legged

stool which Will had risen from to pull his stockings on.. Then his boots, and it was as he was lacing his boots that he straightened himself to say: 'Oh, ay.'

'What?' said Ann.

'Call that boy.'

'Why, there he is,' she said, pointing to Will, who was wiping himself after a dip in the tub of dirty water under the table.

'I don't mean him.' He bent again to finish lacing his boots. 'Call that other boy as well.'

'What other - you don't mean little Joe, Rhys?'

'Who else?'

'Bu - but what for this time o' the morning?'

'To go to his work, woman.'

'Work?' Her jaw dropped with the word which opened her eyes wide like saucers.

'Yes.' He stood up to explain. 'Last night in The Black Cock, Isaac Huws told me that there's a boy wanted to mind the door inside the double-parting of the seam -'

'Yes, yes, a boy, but not my baby, not my Joe who's not eight year old till Saturday.'

'Well, he's had longer to lie abed than I had. Call him.'

'Rhys, now that he's learning to read a bit in school -'

He turned on her with a snarl. 'Ay, learning to read the *English* in a church school. Will you go an' wake him out o' that bed, or shall I go an' fetch him down by the scruff o' the -'

She stood with her arms outstretched at the foot of the stairs. 'No, no, let me wake him.' With one foot on the bottom step of the stairway she half turned to say appealingly: 'Rhys, let him alone for a bit will you? Only - only a little handful he is, Rhys. Five of our boys the pit have had already, an' one the 'splosion took. Let this one be for a bit, for him to learn a bit for me to put him tidy in a shop behind the counter. Will you, Rhys?'

'Woman, stop your old lol; go an' fetch that boy down to dress.'

'But I haven't got things ready for him to start work, no clothes, no —'

'The clothes he wore to go to that church school to learn the English will do him till you get him others.'

'Yes, but what about a food-box an' a tea-jack, Rhys?'

'He can have mine till you get him some. Put my food in paper, an' my tea in a quart bottle till then.'

'Then there's only enough candles for you an' Will —'

'He won't want candles sitting down minding a door,' he roared impatiently. 'Mind, I'll fetch him down.'

'No, no, I'm going for him.'

'You'd better.' Ann, her toothless upper gum pressed down outside her lower lip, went like going to the scaffold up the narrow and rickety ladder-like stairway, down which she soon returned with Joe in her arms. 'He's not properly awake yet,' she said with a rather foolish smile.

Rhys dragged the child out of her arms to set him like a doll on the three-legged stool. 'Get dressed to go to your work,' he growled. 'Move yourself, woman — get the food —'

'Yes, yes — but let me give him his clothes. Here you are, Joe bach. Going to work with dad — going to be a man, ain't you, Joe bach?'

The child with his eyes half open tried to smile as pulling his trousers on. He was only about a yard high, and as skinny as anything he was. Legs and arms like knitting-needles — but he was sharp for his age. After he had drawn his boots on he waited. 'Are you going to lace my boots, our mam?'

'No,' said his father.

'I always have up to now,' said Ann.

'Let him learn to do things for hisself. Come, boy.'

'Yes, dad.' It was a case of more hurry less speed, for which Ann was to blame, for hadn't she been dressing and spoiling the boy all his life until he could hardly do a thing for himself? He had never as much as washed himself. 'Where's the water to wash me, our mam?' His father

pointed with his foot to the tub half full of dirty water under the table. ‘Swill yourself in that, then come to your food.’ ‘Yes, dad.’ Having wiped himself after a lick of dirty water he sat next to his brother Will at table. ‘Now, eat a bellyful, Joe bach,’ said his mother, smiling wet, then turning to wipe tears with her apron. ‘Yes, and be quick about it,’ growled his father, in a hurry to get back to the pit still carrying the dirt of yesterday. The boy Joe looked at his father drinking tea out of his moustache-cup. This was the first time he had seen his father on a working-day morning. He looked different somehow.

Encouraged by his mother, the boy went on eating until the first of the morning hooters sang its prologue to the day’s story. ‘Come on, you two,’ said the father as he rose from the table to pocket his food in paper and the quart bottle filled with weak tea, ‘there’s five o’clock already. The day’ll be gone before we look around.’

The boys swallowed the last mouthfuls of tea in their cups, and rose still chewing to pocket their food-boxes and tea-jacks, but little Joe found that he had no pockets big enough in the clothes he had attended school in the day previous. With his food-box in one hand, and his tea-jack – which was his father’s, and almost as tall as the boy was – in the other, he looked at his mother, who said: ‘Carry them to-day, Joe bach, and to-night when you come home I’ll sew pockets inside for you to carry your box and jack like your brother.’

‘Come on,’ growled Rhys, the father, going out.

‘Mind to be a good boy, Joe bach,’ Ann from her doorstep said, as she forced a smile after Joe, who was legging it like anything to keep up with his brother and father. The mother in the doorway watched them go in file over the bridge, the father leading, Will behind him a yard and little Joe behind Will a couple of yards. As turning the corner round which was the hard main road, her ‘baby’ looked back and raised the hand in which he held the big tea-jack. She waved back, tears streaming down her face

like a death-mask. The sun coming an angry red through the morning mist made her look awful as she stood in the doorway with her Adam's apple working up and down under the skin of her scraggy neck, as she gulped and gulped again. Men passing on their way to work threw her good-mornings, but she neither saw nor heard anything. Stood there feeling as weak as a rabbit, which was no wonder, for not a drop or a bite had she taken. Yet that was not the reason for her weakness, for no woman in the Row took anything until after they had got their men and boys off to work. 'Must drink a cup o' tea,' she muttered several times before she at last poured herself a cup. Feeling better she was as she rose from the table to call the two gels to go to their work at the brickyard, but the sight of Joe's top upside-down at the end of the mantelpiece shattered her, made her sit down again to howl like anything. 'My baby, oh my baby.' Enough to wake the dead she howled.

'Great heavens, what's the matter?' a soprano and contralto wanted to know.

'Oh, my little baby, my little Joe,' she sobbed.

Two young women in flannel nightdresses came through the curtain out of the downstairs bedroom. The one was as fair as the other was dark.

'What's happened to our Joe?' they wanted to know.

'He have took him, took my little Joe to the pit, an' him not eight till Saturday. There, he have had 'em all now. For to get another half-crown a week to spend on drink he have took my little Joe.'

'Is that all?' said Moriah, the dark girl, indifferently, yawning and scratching herself. 'I thought he was dead by the row you made. Let's go back to bed, Megan.'

'Bed, no - get dressed,' said Megan, the fair girl. She put her arms around her mother. Joe, coming when he did into the world, had been everybody's baby in a way, and Megan's as much as anybody's, so she was feeling his being taken to the pit that morning nearly as much as

the mother was. ‘There, there, don’t cry, mam fach.’ But cry she would.

Moriah, pulling her nightdress off over her head, murmured: ‘I don’t remember her crying when we was sent to the brickyard to work for three an’ six a week.’

‘Shut up – an’ put something on, don’t stand there scratching yourself,’ said Megan.

‘Who’re you bossing, our Megan?’

‘I’ll show you if you don’t shut up an’ get dressed.’

‘Yes, you’ll show a lot –’

‘That’ll do, that’ll do,’ said Ann, wiping her face with her apron. ‘Don’t you two start now.’

The girls dressed, but they didn’t wash themselves before sitting down to breakfast, or before leaving for work. ‘No. I’m not going to wash in that,’ said Moriah, looking at the dirty water in the tub under the table.

‘Well, that’s all the water we’ve got for washing in till the tap comes on middle-day,’ said her mother.

‘Can I wet the end o’ this towel with a drop out o’ the kettle?’

‘If you do you’ll be that much short to take in your tea-jack to work.’

‘How long is it since we had a proper wash, our mam?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the mother, cutting food to fill the girls’ food-boxes with. ‘It’s been dry for so long. The spring was like summer – then the works takes most o’ the water that comes from the new waterworks.’

‘Humph, their water in the works isn’t turned off for best part of every day. There’s plenty o’ navvies about, so why don’t they make more waterworks. Then p’raps we’d be able to wash all over now and then in clean water, not water like that in the tub under the table, water with the dirt of the pit thick in it. Sometimes I feel like going up to the Blue Pool in Pontsarn where the men an’ boys do swim to wash all over.’

‘Don’t talk so shameful, gel,’ said her mother.

‘Have you had any food, mam?’ said Megan.

'I've had a cup o' tea.'

'Come an' have a bit to eat — pour tea for mam, Moriah'

'In a minute,' said Moriah, who was massing her shiny black hair for hiding away under the big square of red rag she used to guard her hair from brick- and coal-dust.

'Sit down there, mam,' said Megan, pushing her mother into the armchair. She poured tea for her mother, cut food for her. 'Now, come on — eat.'

The old woman — far from being as old as she looks, for she's not yet forty-eight — sat eating and drinking tea whilst the girls covered their hair and talked, for they had a few minutes to spare this morning. They didn't have to be in the brickyard before six. As the mother looked at them and listened to them she was thinking: I was married before I was your age. Was I ever as good-looking as them? Megan is putting her fair hair out of sight under her head-rag. Lovely hair she's got. So fair an' — but no lovelier than Moriah's. Heavy boots on their feet, their hair now out of sight, their hands as rough as sand-paper, their finger-nails torn. Moriah running to the glass to see herself all time — who's to see you in the morning? She hums a song evenly for Megan's soprano voice to run up and down hers, which is contralto. Their mother, they know, likes to hear them singing a bit.

Not so their father, Rhys Davies. He didn't like singing heard outside the chapel he should have been ashamed to go to, but wasn't. Every Sunday evening he defiantly went to Zoar Chapel with his wife, and he saw that his children still at home went to Zoar three times each Sunday as regular as the clock. He himself went once, in the evening, defiantly. 'All you've got against me is the drop o' drink,' his eyes spoke as they met the eyes of deacons so strict as to make members afraid to brush their hair back off their foreheads. But Rhys Davies was not afraid of deacons, only of God — a little, that's all — was he afraid. He never spoke bad language, or took the Lord's name in vain. In chapel when the preacher was praying for the congregation

Rhys Davies sat with his eyes shut saying all the time to God: 'There's only the drop o' drink between You and me, remember. Nothing more than the drop o' drink. I don't have anything to say to the Irish, the English, or any of the other foreigners that have come into our district. And I tries to keep my family away from these foreigners. So, when all's said and done, there's only the drop o' drink between us.' A drop, indeed.

'Lucky for you two gels that your father was like he was last night,' Ann was saying. 'If he knew you was out so late -'

'Late?' cried Moriah. 'Ten o'clock isn't late. Some o' the gels in the brickyard stays out much later than that, and their fathers don't as much as lay a finger on 'em.'

'They'll be sorry they didn't. Leaving gels run the roads till all hours of the night.'

'We wasn't running the roads last night,' said Megan, 'for we never moved out o' the Cheap Jack's. Oh, I could listen to that man for ever. Talk - no, I've never heard his like. Welsh or English, it's lovely to hear him.'

'I'd rather hear him sing than talk,' said Moriah, 'him or them other three men he's got singing an' selling for him. Oh, the comic's enough to make you die laughing, our mam.'

'No doubt,' said her mother dryly, 'but what I'm telling you is to be home in tidy time. For if your father -'

'Yes, but what do you call "tidy time", our mam?'

'Nine o'clock at the latest.'

'But mam,' said Megan, 'it's nearly seven before we're home from the brickyard, an' it's eight before we're changed ready to go out.'

'You know that your father -'

'Well, you may as well know that we'll be later to-night than last night,' said Moriah.

'Then if your father is in his sober senses you can look out, that's all, my gel.'

'Listen, mam,' said Megan, 'we won't be running the

roads. To-night the singing for the marble clock is over there in the Cheap Jack's, an' me an' our Moriah are going to sing together for it -'

'Yes,' said Moriah, 'and all the gels from our brickyard are coming to put their hands up for us. Last night the Cheap Jack showed the clock - must be worth pounds, our mam. That's for the duet, the marble clock is -'

'If your father hears that you've been making an old show of yourselves in front of people, it's he'll make you sing a duet.'

'He won't be home till we're gone.'

'An' if when he comes, he asks where we are, you can say - well, say we're gone up to see old bopa Lloyd.'

'I'll tell no lies for you.'

'It needn't be a lie,' said Megan, 'for we'll slip up to see her before going to the Cheap Jack's to sing.'

'I tell you it'll be God help the pair of you when your father gets to hear that you've been making an old show of yourselves in front of people.'

'Standing up to sing in front of people is not making any old show of ourselves. We sings in chapel -'

'Where they don't offer marble clocks for the best,' said Moriah.

'Chapel's different, my gel, for chapel's not a Cheap Jack's place. You're both old enough to remember what your father done to your brother Sam that time he brought the medal home from that boxing-booth.'

'But that was because Sam was courting Eileen Murphy, an' she Irish. Anyway, singing for a marble clock is not fighting for medals in a boxing-booth.'

'It's making an old show of yourselves, so your father thinks. An' if you brought a marble clock home from the Cheap Jack's he'd only throw it over the bridge into the brook, same as he did Sam's medal - look at the time. You'll have to hurry.'

After they had gone off to their work in the brickyard Ann sat looking at the mantelpiece, at the little clock

flanked by brass candlesticks. Yes, a marble clock would look grand there. Her girls would surely win it if they were permitted to try, for they could sing lovely. All her children could sing lovely. Yes, she could tell him, that's if he came home sober and happened to ask, then she could tell him that they had gone up to Penydarren to see how old bopa Lloyd was – no lie either, for Megan would be sure to take Moriah with her to see old bopa Lloyd before going to the Cheap Jack's to sing. Then perhaps he would come home same as last night, too drunk to wash himself or care about anything. Still he might get to know later, and then – then the gels would know all about it. Her eyes moving from where she was placing the marble clock to where Joe's top stood upside-down started her thinking about her 'baby' again, and sent her crying back to her bed. The 'little handful' he had snatched from her to take him down, down. . . . Left her with nothing, less than nothing. He had snatched them away from her one after the other to start making men of them before they'd had a chance to be boys. In the dark, in the twinkling of an eye, he and the rest of 'em whoever they were had transformed her children so young and tender into little old men who chewed tobacco and talked big. There will be a different look in my Joe's eyes to-night – and him not eight till Saturday. But the child is gone, ay, and the boy too. Gone, gone down, down, down, to come up a man-made man. Her 'baby'. 'He is lost, and gone for ever, oh, my dar –' For ever? She rounded the curtain to go and look at the empty bed in which the impression of Joe's body could still be plainly seen along the side nearest the wall. She flung herself on the bed clawing the emptiness. Nothing. Nobody, God help her. He might have left her one to make full the fifteen hours from the time they left the house till they returned at night. No, not one. She had wanted her two gels taught dressmaking, and how Rhys had laughed. Pay for learning to sew? Ha, ha, ha – yes, you can laugh. Wasn't there a wage to be earned at the brickyard? or

oiling trams on top o' one o' the pits? Hadn't his own mother had to go working *down* a pit long before she was their age? They were lucky to be allowed to work above ground. So, to the brickyard send 'em. . . . All right then, Rhys, but why take my youngest and last? an' him not eight till Saturday. Where is he now with you? Where is my baby now with you? . . .

'Here we are then,' said Rhys, stopping before a door about half a mile from the pit-bottom, 'here's the door you're to mind — wait till all these men an' boys have gone in by to their work, then dad'll show you.' With his huge hands he brushed the two boys back from the sludgy roadway to stand one each side him against the side-timbers. There they stood whilst about a hundred men and half as many boys passed by, some carrying candles, others naked-light lamps. They opened the door against which air-pressure was making underworld music, and after they had passed through the doorway the door closed behind them with a terrific bang, and the air's roar, which had been interrupted whilst the door was open, continued. The men and boys shielded their lights against the rush of air as nearing the door, so the candles stuck in hand-balls of damp soft clay, and the naked-lights others carried, floodlit the faces of the holders. With their bodies they shielded their lights against currents of air which threatened to blow them out or make the candles burn wastefully down one side.

Joe noticed that his father exchanged greetings only with the Welsh who passed, and in Welsh they said 'good morning' or 'how-do'. When some of the men passed, Joe's father spat out his contempt with his tobacco-juice. That was his only reply to a 'good morning' or 'how-do' in English from those of the English minority as they passed by. Joe, without a light of any sort, had travelled his first half-mile underground between his father and brother, both of whom carried claybound candle-lights. Here and

there along the roadway the gluey sludge was above Joe's ankles, and its suction caused a succession of angry 'bloops' as feet were pulled clear of it. Heavy going little Joe found it, so he was glad when his dad had halted him near the door against which, when it was closed, the air made a noise which sounded strange to Joe. 'I think my feet are wet, dad,' he said.

'That's nothing,' said his father. 'Your mother shall buy you strong working-boots when you get a full pay. Now listen. You don't have to open that door for men and boys to pass — remember that now.'

'Yes, dad.'

'You only open it for the hauliers to drive their horses through without having to stop. Without having to *stop*, I said.'

'Yes, dad, without having to stop.'

'That's the boy. I'm staying here with you until the hauliers come on from the pit with their first journey of empty trams. Will, you go on to the place to start holing that slip across the face.' Will stood looking at Joe. 'Well, why don't you go when I tell you?'

'I'm going,' said Will. 'Thinking I was, thinking that p'raps we could spare our Joe one, if not two, of our candles.'

'Go to your work when you're told,' growled his father. 'He don't want light to sit here doing this job.'

Will, shielding his candle, grasped the iron handle attached to the 'pull' side of the door to pull it open just enough for him to pass through out of sight. As the door slammed behind him Joe felt like crying. Gone, he was thinking, and there's only dad now, and soon he'll be gone too, then there'll only be me, by myself, here in the dark with —

'You won't want any light, see, Joe,' his father was saying, 'for you won't have to move from this little cwtch here in the side, where you'll be clear of the trams an' everything. See, there's some old brattice-cloth on that stone for you

to sit on nice an' comfortable. From there - see this length of rope?"

'Yes, dad.'

'That's the boy. Here it is where you can put your hand to it, an' the other end is fastened to the iron handle of the door. Now all you've got to do when you hear the hauliers coming - but not before you see the lights in their caps - is to pull the rope from where you're sitting, pull to open the door for them to drive their horses through without stopping. Then after they've passed through, give the door a bit of a push from here, an' it'll shut itself. See?'

'Yes, dad.'

'That's the boy. What if we try it now before the hauliers do come? Just for you to see how easy it is. Now, pull.'

Little Joe pulled at the rope, and still the door wouldn't open. 'Pull, boy,' his father growled. Joe pulled as hard as ever he could to master the pressure of air which was blowing against the door, which opened with a gusty snarl. 'That's the boy. Now just a tiny push to shut it.' Joe gave it the tiniest push, and the door speeded by air-pressure savagely slammed, the slam shaking particles of rock from the roof above. 'There, that's all it is,' said his father. 'But you mustn't let it slam so hard as that, Joe bach, for if you do you'll have the brickwork over the door, an' the turf making the sides of the door airtight, all coming loose. Then the fireman an' the old overman will be cursing you. So steady it going back with your rope. Now try it again.' Joe opened and shut the door a few times. 'You'll come,' his father said. 'A couple o' days an' you'll be all right. Listen. Hear anything?'

There was a sound like thunder distant. 'Yes, dad.'

'It's the hauliers coming in from the pit-bottom with empties, so the pit have started to wind coal. Now you'll see some fine horses.'

Joe was hearing more of his father's voice than he had ever heard before. The rumbling sound was getting louder, and now there was a new and distinct note, the note

of iron. Iron trams travelling over iron rails, with iron hooks linking iron trams drawn by iron-shod horses. The length of rails near which Joe and his dad were crouching was beginning to anticipate the burden passing over rails some distance away. 'There's a light,' said Joe. 'Yes, the light in the first hauliers' cap, you'll be able to see them a long way off as they come in from the pit with empties, but you won't be able to see them at all as they come back with full trams, for the door's in the way. So you'll have to use your ears, Joe bach. If you open the door too soon, then the air will go to waste, an' there's none too much air as it is on where me an' your brother is working. All the same, you mustn't open it too late, an' get cursed by the haulier for stopping him. You must judge it to a nicety. Mustn't you now?'

'Yes, dad.'

'That's the boy. Now be ready with the rope.'

With two hands on the rope Joe waited. A glance to the left to note how near the hauliers were. Several lights to be seen now, and the singing of the hauliers could be heard as they rode forward like jockeys on the iron attachment they called 'the gun', which was shaped like a swan's neck, and it joined the horse to the tram it was pulling, how was more than Joe could make out then. It was the terrible smell he was most conscious of just then - 'Now,' snapped his father. He pulled for all he was worth at the rope and the door opened. Five horses, each with three empty trams behind it, coupled with straight coupling hooks, passed in turn. As each horse passed, Joe, eyes now accustomed to the gloom, noticed how greasy and swollen the horses' heels were. Ah, that was the smell. He knew that smell, for he had seen and smelt horses in a similar state hauling house-coal round the houses of the world above. Ex-pit horses that had been too much for the strongest-stomached haulier underground sent up the pit to finish their days hauling coal around the houses. Now greasy heels phosphorescent as they came one after the

other up out of the sludge within a yard of young Joe's nose.

A man whose naked-light lamp was spilling light from the poke of his cap, to which it was fastened by its one leg inside the sewn-on loop, leapt nimbly down from the coupling of the fifth horse's last two trams as it was travelling. 'Joe, steady that door as it's shutting, for here's the master-haulier,' said Joe's father quietly. Joe steadied the door as it was closing.

'Hullo, Rhys,' cried the master-haulier, who did not drive a horse, but went about after the hauliers who did. For that reason he was called by some 'the doggy-haulier', others called him 'nigger-driver'. His name was Hugh Williams, but everybody called him 'Hugh Nannie' after his mother, who had kept a bakehouse for years after she was left a widow with a houseful of children. 'Is this our new doorboy?' said Hugh Nannie.

'Ay, this is him.'

'Small, ain't he, Rhys?'

'Oh, I don't know. He's eight years old, an' strong for his age. He'll mind your door for you. I must go on to my work. Joe, remember what I told you.'

'Yes, dad.'

'Here,' cried Hugh Nannie, 'where's the boy's light?'

'What light do he want by there sitting down pulling that rope?' said Rhys before the door slammed behind him. 'H'm,' said Hugh Nannie, looking down on Joe, 'your father don't waste his candles. Are you afraid?'

'Er - er - no.'

'What's your name?'

'Joe.'

'Well, Joe, there's nothing to be afraid of. The rats - well, the bigger they are, the more harmless. I shall be back an' fore after them hauliers from morning till night, so you'll be all right. When snap-time comes I'll come an' have mine here with you. Now I must be after them hauliers.' The door slammed behind him and his light.

Darkness. Thick, heavy, uneasy darkness. Oh, mam. He felt for the food-box and tea-jack to get from them what support he could. Oh, mam. As he felt for the food-box and tea-jack his hands encountered cold clammy rock, and pit-moss dank on side-timbers. Oh, mam. Shudderingly he felt about him until his hands closed on the tea-jack and food-box, which he hugged as though it were his mother he was clinging to. Drip, drip, drip of water, rushing of air, pouncing of coal in the distance, slow squeeze of the earth above cracking upright pit-props, and bending to breaking-point the horizontal timber collars across the roadway. The rumble of trams in the distance, everything on the move — What's that? The rats. Oh, mam. His brother Will had told him of rats and mice. 'Rats where it's wet an' sludgy, mice where it's dry an' dusty,' he had said. Then these must be rats. One scurried squealing up the side-timber past his right ear. Oh, mam, send somebody with a light, our mam. 'Listen,' his dad had said. Was this the haulier now? He put down the tea-jack and food-box to feel for the rope. I've got it — but mustn't open the door too soon. Listen. Better soon than late — there's another rat. I'll open it now, must see a light, must see a light. . . .

He pulled frantically to open the door. The coming light sent the rats hurrying through the sludge back to their holes each side the roadway. A light, a light coming. A horse already steaming with sweat, and the smell of its greasy heels now the sweetest smell in Joe's nostrils, came bloop, bloop through the sludge with three trams loaded with coal behind it. 'Keep the door open, other hauliers close behind,' sang out the haulier riding his 'gun' like a jockey. In less than a minute the five horses, each drawing three trams loaded with coal, had passed Joe on their way back to the pit-bottom. Then the darkness and all it held again. But Joe was less afraid of it now, knowing that it would not last long. Hugh Nannie would see to that. He had ridden past on the coupling of the last two trams

of the three drawn by the fifth horse, and he would see that those five hauliers would soon be on their way back with three empty trams behind each of their horses.

So Joe's door was a main-line door, a busy door, and wasn't he glad it was busy. Better to keep pulling at the rope till his arms left their sockets than sit there in the dark with the rats, which, before the day was out, he was shooing away and swiping at with his cap. About middle-day it was when Hugh Nannie leapt off the coupling of an empty journey to say that he would stay there to have food with Joe if Joe had no objection to him doing so. The hauliers were going to have theirs inside on the double parting, but he preferred Joe's company to theirs, he said. A boss-haulier, he told Joe - 'You might be a boss-haulier some day yourself' - should never eat or drink with the hauliers he had to boss about all day and every day. Better leave 'em to themselves to eat their grub, after which they can for a few minutes get off their chests everything they've got against me. Let 'em call me what they like, nigger-driver - anything. Then they're all the easier to handle afterwards.

The boss-haulier talked and talked, and he gave Joe a piece of bakestone cake out of his food-box. He said a doorboy's job was as good a job as there was to start at. Many a man who had started by minding a door same as Joe had finished up - 'Ever hear of Edward Plummer, boy?'

'No.'

'Well, he was only a doorboy, you know, but by keeping his mouth shut an' his eyes open he learnt - Can you read?'

'Yes, a bit.'

'Wish I could - an' I will before I die. This Edward Plummer I was telling you about had no schoolin' either. Minding a door same as you, an' learning to read a bit when he had candle to read with. Ay, an' before he was fourteen he was boss of a big district. After that he owned

pits hisself, an' he was able to stand on his own two legs to talk better than any schoolmaster. There's a doorboy for you. Now he's boss of I don't know how many hundred men. An' there must be bosses as well as doorboys. You'd think to hear these hauliers o' mine talk that all bosses were devils an' worse. If I let 'em lie on their backs sleeping half the day I'd be a trump, see, Joe bach, but because I sees that they do what they're well paid to do - I'm a flamer. But the overman he looks to me to see that the coal to keep the pit going comes out from there.' He pointed to the door. 'If the coal isn't forthcoming, it's to me the overman comes ramping mad.' He picked up his food-box and tea-jack and stood up. 'Yes, an' I'd better be getting after 'em before they get too lazy to move.' With his hand on the iron handle of the door he said: 'Don't forget what I told you about Edward Plummer, Joe bach. Only a doorboy same as you, remember.' The door slammed behind him. Darkness again, but not so terrifying now.

CHAPTER II

BRICKYARD BEAUTIES

IT was dinner-time in the brickyard on the Twyn, and before the hooter had properly cleared its throat to hoot loud enough for the men working in the clay-pit to hear its call to food, the girls working in the brickyard had downed tools to pick up their food-boxes and tea-jacks. Sacks, hand-leathers, shovels, down with the lot. The tram of clay which the girls had been unloading was left in the way of the men who had driven into the yard to load up with bricks for the builders. Men with a variety of hairy designs decorating their faces stood up in empty carts holding horses' reins, and shouting at the girls to move things out of their way.

'Shift 'em yourself, it's our dinner-time,' said Sophie Morris, the mother of the brickyard, as she led the way clear of the yard and up towards the patch of green shaded by trees. This patch of green shaded by trees was high up between the clay-pit and the coal level which supplied the brickyard with raw material and baking-power. Each year the clay-pit reduced the area on which rough grass and trees grew to provide the girls with summertime picnics of an hour's duration. It was too far to come for breakfast at half-past eight, for half an hour is not much, but from one to two o'clock is an hour, and all the girls could eat what food they had left over from breakfast in a quarter of that time, so there was three-quarters of an hour left for talking and singing.

There were about sixty girls running in Indian file after

Sophie along the horse-shoe shaped path edging the clay-pit. The girls ran in clogs and in heavy men's boots as though they were wearing spiked shoes for sprinting. 'They won't run back to work as fast when the hooter blows two,' grumbled one of the carters who had had to get down out of his cart to move things the girls had left lying about in his way. He and the two other carters backed their horses to place their carts where they could best load bricks from the stack in which there were thousands, if not scores of thousands of bricks. Before they started to load the carters lowered their horses' nosebags so that they could have a bit of a feed whilst loading was in progress. The girls were by this time grouping themselves on the rough grass, and under the trees so shady above the clay-pit. One of the carters chuckled and said to another: 'Listen to them up there. Ha, ha, like a lot of children at a tea-party.'

So they were like a lot of children. Half of them were no more than children, anyway. Dai Nelly's gel is only eleven and she's been working a year already. But she's big for her age, and she told the man she was twelve when applying for her job a year ago. Then Dan Sara's gel is a week younger than Dai Nelly's gel, much smaller than her too – but she's the liveliest little imp. The tricks she's played on the others are too numerous to mention. Anyway, there they are under the trees twittering and laughing, sixty of them all told, ranging in age from ten to twenty. Only one over twenty, and she's nearly thirty. Sophie Morris, 'mother of the brickyard', as some call her, is the oldest hand in age and length of service. She is also the highest paid, for she gets nine shillings a week for looking after the pan that goes round and round crushing and mixing clay until it is almost in a paste and fit for the moulding. Yes, nine shillings a week she earns, and that amount is nearly three times the amount most of the other girls earn in a week. What is a week, their working week? Fifty-nine hours. From Monday to Friday they work ten and a half

hours each day, on Saturday only six and a half hours, for they finish at one o'clock on Saturday. Most of the girls are paid three shillings and sixpence a week, a few get four shillings and sixpence a week, which is nearly a penny an hour, and there are two girls, who are saving up to get married, earning five shillings a week, which is more than a penny an hour, for they only work fifty-nine hours, for which they receive sixty pennies.

The work they do for the wages they receive on Saturday is not so interesting as all that. Take Sophie's job for a start. She stands all day by the circular iron pan which goes round and round. A little engine which is looked after by a nine-year-old boy — he earns half a crown a week — drives the big circular iron pan round and round. Sophie, with a shovel hardly ever out of her hands, watches the clay in the pan as it is being crushed into powder. She adds water, only so much. A little drop more. With the shovel turn the revolving mass of clay over. Ready for the moulding. 'Come on, you gels.' That's what the man said when he brought the tram of clay from the clay-pit in the first place. 'Come on, you gels.' Each little gel with a sack on her back trotting with three large shovelfuls of clay from the tram to unload it into Sophie's roundabout pan. On the trot with three large square-mouthed shovelfuls of dry clay in the sack on the ten, eleven, and twelve-year-old gels' backs. Three large square-mouthed shovelfuls of clay is not a lot for a gel anything from ten to twelve years old to carry in a sack on her back. May get to feel a bit heavy before night, or when it rained all day. But then if a gel ran quickly to unload the clay off her back into Sophie's pan, then she made the return journey to the tram for more with only the empty sack on her back. Some of the girls emptied the rough clay into Sophie's pan, others, when it was crushed and mixed into a paste, had to carry it away from the pan to the 'tables', as they called them, where it was moulded into brick-shape.

There were all sorts of jobs to keep the gels busy, and you

had to keep them busy, for if you didn't they'd start playing 'fortune-telling' and other girlish games. If they had half a chance they'd gather together to sing, and sometimes two of them would start to fight and pull each other's hair. Then Sophie would have to leave the pan to look after itself for a minute whilst she separated the gels fighting. 'I'll give you fighting,' she said, pulling 'em apart to boot them one each way. But, fair play for 'em, they didn't often fight. Sometimes, yes, often gels had to go out of the brickyard on top of a cartload of bricks. Two little gels on top of each cartload of bricks the boat on the canal was waiting for. It was a bit of a jaunt right through the town for the gels, and when they got to the canal where the boat was the gels got down and put their hand-leathers on. One gel stood on the canal bank to receive the bricks the carter threw down at her two at a time, and she threw them two at a time to the gel in the boat, which some called a barge. The bargee and his boy waited either in The Corner House or The Miners' Arms until the brickyard gels had loaded the boat with the number of bricks he wanted for Cardiff or some other place between Cardiff and Merthyr. Some days the man throwing the bricks down from the cart was in a bit of a hurry, for often the bargee would come cursing out of the public-house to ask when he was going to get his load of bricks to get away to where the bricks was wanted. Then the carter high up in the cart would throw two bricks a time faster at the gel on the ground, and sometimes before her hands was ready for the bricks, and the two bricks might hit her breasts then forming, and a few gels had bad breasts because of that. Yet they liked the jaunt out of the brickyard and down through the town and across to the canal where the boat was to help load it with bricks two at a time. They had to keep tally of the number of bricks they loaded the canal boat with. Two bricks come heavy down off a cart heavy into the leather-protected hands of a gel from ten to twelve years old. When it was possible to arrange it one of the older gels, say from fifteen to seven-

teen years old, was sent with one small gel, the big gel to receive the downward throw from the carter in his cart, and the smaller gel to stand in the canal boat to receive the more or less level throw, the lighter throw, from the gel on the bank, who was what might be called 'the receiver-general' of the labour and danger. But it wasn't often that an older and stronger girl could be spared from the brickyard, so two of the younger and smaller gels had to go and do the best they could.

'Listen to 'em,' said one carter to the other as the girls, who had now finished what bit of food they had left over from breakfast, began to sing. The carters bent over the brick stack straightened themselves for a minute to look over the clay-pit to where the girls were all seated around Sophie under the trees. Like a queen Sophie sat a little above her sixty girls in a broken-down wooden tram turned out from the coal-level. From where the carters stood looking the broken-down tram looked like a throne for Sophie. Patches of sunlight alternating with patches of shade made the girls look pretty sitting about up there with red cloths over their hair every one. From a distance their heavy clogs and boots and dirty clothes were not noticeable, but their singing like birds made everybody within the radius of a half-mile or so sit or stand up and take notice. 'Listen to those brickyard gels,' people said.

Yes, they could sing. Nine out of every ten of 'em were members of choirs in their chapels, where without knowing a note of music they quickly learnt choruses and hymn-tunes. By ear they picked up a part in a chorus as easy as a bird picks up a worm turned up by a man digging his bit o' garden. And after finishing their food in the brickyard they picked up songs from each other as easy as they picked up bricks to throw. Words and tune by ear only, for not one of the sixty now singing had ever seen the inside of a day-school. Neither had their brothers down the pits, the brothers who sang as well as they did. Each Christmas-time there were Eisteddfods in the Temperance Hall, and

solos and duets and choruses sung at the Eisteddfods were the day after sung word for word and note for note in brick-yards and in the colliers' trains taking men to the pits.

'Yes, they can sing, I'll say that for 'em,' said the carter, going on with the loading of his cart. In the fine weather which had made water scarcer than beer they had been singing every dinner-time for a month up there under the trees, where Sophie had been running a sort of eliminating competition to select the two girls to represent the brickyard in the duet competition for the marble clock the Cheap Jack was offering as the prize. Some people did not consider Sophie a fit and proper person to run anything, or to be anywhere near where respectable gels are. For Sophie had years ago had a baby by a chap who had slung his hook to somewhere before she was up out of bed after being confined. Now that baby was working in Gethin Pit, where he was known as Ted Sophie after his unmarried mother. Eleven years old he was now, and a good boy to his mother he was. But where unmarried mothers and their illegitimate children were concerned most of the people of the place had very long memories indeed, and the chapel people especially. Eleven years gone now, and still plenty to wrinkle their noses when passing Sophie, but that didn't worry her any more now that her boy had turned out such a good boy. He was all she had, for the Cholera when it came about the time when her shameful condition was plain for everybody to see, took her mother and father. 'A blessing they was took,' some of the chapel people said, 'before that gel o' theirs brought the baby's she's carrying so bold.'

Perhaps it is not quite correct to say that Sophie's boy is all she has now that her father and mother are gone to their graves, and her brothers and sisters married and gone to live where nobody can twit them about Sophie having a baby. For Sophie in addition to being mother to her own boy who'll be lucky if he ever sees his father, is a sort of mother to all the gels working with her and under her in

the brickyard. They all tell Sophie what troubles they have. For from the day when each little gel comes first to the brickyard Sophie has watched over them. 'Come here, gel fach.' Asking her name, cutting hand-leathers to protect the little hands, watching over them in every way. Each year several girls leave the brickyard to get married after a period of courting during which Sophie has been kept informed of everything. Many a grateful young mother, remembering the years with Sophie in the brickyard, naming their baby girls after her.

Sophie by this time is not near as good-looking as she was when that old chap took such a mean advantage of her. But all the other girls now seated around Sophie, seated on the grass in the shade of the trees, are real beauties. Yes, their good looks are enough to overcome the limitations of labour. Their hair hidden away out of sight under hair-cloths, heavy boots or clogs on their feet, and their hands rough. Then it's few of them were able to wash themselves before coming to their work this morning, for there was no water to be had.

But they'll all find water from somewhere to wash a bit o' themselves this evening, when all the gels of the place will be at the Cheap Jack's to hear the singing. The gels working in the two brickyards won't need as much water to wash themselves clean with, but the gels working on top of all the pits will need as much water as the men of the pits. For the gels working on top of the many pits will be oil and grease up to their knees and elbows, and as black all over with coal-dust as any of the men. So they'll have to find enough water from somewhere to wash themselves all over same as the men. There's the never-failing well up the mountain a couple o' mile, but if they're going to the Cheap Jack's to hear the singing, then there won't be time for them to go all the way up there to fetch water. It'll be quicker for them to get a bucketful out o' what's left in the River Taff or the Morlais Brook, and boil the stink out o' that, then wait for it to cool off a bit before washing themselves all

over in that. Take the bucketful of hot water out of the living-room where the sons and fathers are trying to clean themselves in the tubs, take it into the little downstairs bedroom the gels will. There they will have to clean themselves best they can. With the pithead gels it's the oil and grease is the worst. Water must be hot to get that off. They get the worst of it off before the water cools, then they rub themselves almost raw with rough towelling trying to get the rest off. With a cupful of hot water out of the kettle they clean their necks and faces. For they must get to the Cheap Jack's.

Sophie and the gels seated about her could see all of Merthyr, and to the right of 'em Penydarren and Dowlais. The sun had passed over the almost dry stretch of the River Taff to make shiny a stretch of the green to black water of the Glamorganshire Canal, and the sun's glow could be seen dazzling some of the windows of Cyfarthfa Castle, and the surface of the lake in the castle's sixty-two acre park. Before the castle the girls had heard the famous Cyfarthfa Band playing in the evenings for them living in the castle, and the girls they stood of an evening on the mountain where the never-failing well was to listen. A grand band the Cyfarthfa Band was. It was Crawshay's band same as the castle, and the Englishman named Livsey could conduct the band for Mr. Crawshay almost as well as Rosser Beynon could lead the singing in Zoar Chapel.

The place where the brickyard gels were sitting was a grand place to sit and sing in the summer. For they could see everything right up to Morlais Castle, to which Edward the First had once come to see what his son-in-law was up to all the time. . . .

'Listen to me now,' Sophie was saying, 'for the hooter'll be going in a minute. All of you to be at the Cheap Jack's to-night to put your hands up for Megan an' Moriah after they've sung there, remember. There's couples from the other brickyard, from the works, the pits, an' from everywhere coming to sing for the marble clock, all with plenty

butties to hold their hands up an' shout for 'em. So mind you're all there to shout for our two singers.'

'I won't be there,' said Lizzie Jacky, whose father was called after his mother, Ann Jacky, who had been called so because she was Jacky's Ann, being his wife and the mother of his children, and here was the name 'Jacky' being tacked on to the third generation, represented here in the brick-yard by Lizzie, who said: 'No, I won't be coming to the Cheap Jack's to-night to hold my hand up for anybody, for I'm going for tuppence to the Market Hall to see that new company that have come there acting *Jane Shore*.'

'And I,' the gel they called Lucy Fat said, 'I'm goin' to -'

'You needn't tell me, for I know where you're all going to this night if no other,' said Sophie. 'For it's with me you're all going to the Cheap Jack's to hold your hands up for these two gels after they sing. I shall be calling the roll same as they do for the Volunteers on the drill night down the Castle Field, an' those of you that won't be there will be sorry this time to-morrow. I want you all in your bit o' best there to-night, standing close around me to clap your hands hot after Megan an' Moriah sing.'

Lizzie Jacky, now that she knew that she daren't go to the Market Hall, where for tuppence she would be able to see *Jane Shore* acted again, said sneeringly: 'Would you like us to bring our hand-leathers to clap with?'

'It won't pay you, my little gel,' said Sophie, 'to try an' take a lift out o' me. Now, Megan an' Moriah, sing together for us what you're going to sing in the Cheap Jack's to-night.'

They sang the duet they had been practising with the marble clock in mind, and after they had finished singing the duet, Sophie asked Megan to sing by herself, for them to all join in the chorus before the hooter went, the Irish song about Kathaleen.

'I don't like old Irish songs,' said Lizzie Jacky.

'Nobody's asking you to like it. Sing it, Megan fach.'

Megan sang:

'O Kathaleen, so fair and bright,
Star of the eve, and darkest night,
Through shady lanes, and meadows green,
I love to roam with my Kathaleen.'

'Lovely,' Sophie said. They were in the middle of a hymn when the hooter blew two o'clock, but they finished the hymn before rising to their feet. 'Some more savage amusement, as the man said,' sighed Sophie.

'What man?' said Lizzie Jacky.

'How do I know? Come on, gels.'

Slowly they started back to the brickyard, from where the boss's son was shouting like anything: 'Come on, do you hear? Like a funeral coming. You ran up there a lot quicker than you're coming from there. Hurry them down, Sophie.'

The young man groaned as he turned first to the carter, who now that he was loaded was tightening the horses's nosebag around its neck. 'What do you think of 'em?' he said. Then he turned to shout: 'Hurry them down, that's what I said, Sophie.'

'I know what you said, boy bach,' she shouted back. 'But I can't.'

'Why can't you?'

'Because I've got a bone in my leg.'

The girls in file behind Sophie all laughed, the carters now loaded also laughed, but the boss's son he didn't laugh. 'Ain't they a nice lot to handle, enough to drive a man mad they are.'

'Ay, you're right,' chuckled one of the carters. 'Too much of it they are, sure enough. If I was able to write as well as you I'd write to the *Merthyr Express* to say that Sophie's got a bone in her leg, ha, ha, ha.'

'What's that about me?' said Sophie as she came forward into the yard. The carter, still chuckling, pointed with his whip to the boss's son, mad with temper. 'Oh, him,' said Sophie. 'He'll simmer down.'

The Cheap Jack's place of business was only about a stone's throw from Rhys Davies's doorstep, just across the stream, that's all, on a piece of ground waste most of the time. Once it had been part of Penydarren ironworks, from where sixty and odd years previous Trevethick had started that engine of his on its epoch-making journey to the junction nine miles away. Downhill all the way it went with seventy tons of iron in trams behind it, and seventy of the town's most daring spirits riding atop of the iron. It went downhill all right, had it been an uphill journey old Crawshay, the owner of Cyfarthfa works and pits, wouldn't have had to square his bet of a thousand pounds with old Sam Homfray, who was the owner of Penydarren works. Old Sam Homfray he lived in Penydarren House, which is in Penydarren Park, and he liked a bit of a gamble occasionally. Trevethick was working for him, and Trevethick assured him that the engine he had made would go all right. Richard Crawshay, who had nobody making engines for him in Cyfarthfa works, said: 'No, never in this world. An engine that'll travel nine miles? No, no, Sam.' So Sam bet him a thousand pounds that it would, and it did. That was soon after the Glamorganshire Canal was opened all the way from Cardiff to Merthyr, but a long time ago now. For now the Penydarren works are in ruins, and the Cheap Jack's place of business is situated where once iron was running along rails in trams. The iron kings have made way for a Cheap Jack. For 'iron kings' they were, no doubt about that. In 1850 – which is not so long ago – there were forty-seven furnaces in our four ironworks of Dowlais, Cyfarthfa, Penydarren and Plymouth, and the iron went down the canal all the way to Cardiff to be loaded in ships to be taken to all parts of the known world. Rails, cannon and coal we sent all over the world before we had what is called 'a railway system' in the place. Sent it down to Cardiff on our famous canal, which the railway after we got it made a dry ditch of. With the coming of the

railway we doubled our output of the things the world was in need of, ay, and soon the increase of population doubled our parliamentary representation. America and Russia, being short of money at the time, gave our ironmasters bonds for the rails required to develop those continents. Then men from our works went out to those continents to show the people there how to roll rails.

For we had plenty of skilled men to spare Russia and America. Our ironmasters shipped across I don't know how many boatloads of Irish to do all the donkey-work, and thousands of skilled English they brought down to act as pacemakers to the native Welsh. The few Jews and Scots did not wait to be sent for, shipped or fetched; they came without being asked, to prove themselves amazingly self-reliant. Yes, no doubt about it, our place was for best part of a hundred years the liveliest place on earth. Riots — why three times the soldiers had to be sent for. First, dragoons flashing their swords, then kilted Highlanders, whose bullets found billets in Welsh bodies. And Revivals most soul-stirring. Furnace illuminations nightly for a century, and pit explosions periodically. Talk about life — and death, of course.

But the Cheap Jack, who now in this year of grace, 1865, occupies ground which not so long ago was owned by one who helped Anthony Bacon to supply cannon to both sides during the American war, is getting ready for this evening's sale and singing competition, and Megan and Moriah are dressing up to go there to sing. It is Ann, their mother, who is speaking.

'Before you two go to that Cheap Jack's place to sing to-night — whatever will come of it I don't know — mind you first go up as far as Penydarren to see how old bopa Lloyd is. Then I shan't have to tell your father any lies if he happens to ask where you're gone.'

'He'll no doubt be too drunk to ask you anything,' said Moriah, pulling on her elastic-sided boots.

'Perhaps he won't to-night,' said her mother. 'P'raps

he'll bring little Joe straight home. Druan bach, I wonder how he've managed this day.'

'Oh, all right, don't you worry,' said Megan, pinning her brooch.

'He's only a handful, druan bach,' sighed his mother.

'He's nearly as big as we was when we started in the brickyard,' said Moriah.

'He's no such thing, for you two was past ten when you went to work in the brickyard; he's not eight till Saturday.'

'What odds, what odds?' cried Megan impatiently. 'Shut up the pair of you – an' make place for somebody else in front of that glass, Moriah.'

Megan and Moriah looked very nice indeed in what they called their 'bit o' best'. Who would recognise them for two of that noisy gang of brickyard gels who less than an hour ago walked singing along the Tramroad? Then they looked sacklike, nothing much in the way of waist or bust. Heavy boots, their hair hidden in red rag covers. Brick-dusty and clayey. 'Hullo, there's the brickyard gels on their way home,' people living along the Tramroad said. 'Noisy old things as they are. Sights they look, yet they dress like ladies to walk the street.'

'To walk the street' did not mean what is meant by 'street-walking' as practised by unfortunate women. Oh, no. It meant that the town had two parallel thoroughfares, one for use when in one's working-clothes, the other to promenade and do the bit of shopping in when dressed in one's bit o' best. The Tramroad was a sort of 'secret way' which for over a mile ran parallel with the High Street. The distance between the railed Tramroad and the macadamised road of the High Street varied. At some points the distance between was about a dozen yards, at other points about two hundred yards. Between the Tramroad and the High Street there were houses, public-houses, shops, chapels and a church, most of them with their fronts on High Street, and their backs on the Tramroad, which was, after all, a backway with just this to differentiate it from backways

in other places. The Tramroad was residential for the greater part of its length. Houses, most of them small cottages with tiny windows, each side the rails of the Tramroad. Here and there a chapel, also a public-house. People in their working-clothes used the Tramroad in preference to the High Street below. One could sing one's way along the Tramroad without being thought odd, one could run along the Tramroad without being stared at, in brief, the Tramroad was a parallel way along which people did what was not done on the High Street. Women, except when it was a case of life and death and they were running to fetch the doctor, would not walk the Tramroad on dark nights. For it was badly-lit, and there was a graveyard overhanging a dark stretch of the left side between the backs of Pontmorlais and Hope Chapels. Then there were only a couple of conveniences in the town, and after dark men hurried off the crowded main street through one or other of the connecting lanes to use the Tramroad's darkest stretches.

So Megan and Moriah would not dream of 'walking the Tramroad' after dark, or when dressed in their bit o' best, in which they are dressed now. All in black they were, shiny black. Their skirts fell heavily to hide their elastic-sided boots. Their bodices, the double tight necks of which rubbed their chins, finished tight at the waist – everything about them was tight. Whalebone stiffeners around the waist of the bodice inside made of it a sort of outer corset: 'stays', as they would say. The necks of their bodices were set off by big brooches worn in front. Their bodice-sleeves were as tight as could be from wrist to elbow, then as full as could be from elbow to shoulder. Beneath the outer black skirt and bodice they wore flannel body-slips, flannel petticoats and drawers with knee-tapes for tying the top of their long and thick woollen stockings. Their hair under big hats was massed behind, crimped and fringed in front. They wore no coats or cloaks, for it was hot summer.

They walked quickly up towards where old bopa Lloyd lived in Penydarren, keeping up with the bus drawn by three horses, for they wanted to get back soon to the Cheap Jack's. They had good legs, for neither of them had had a ride in their lives. No money for what they called 'rides' on bus, brake, or train.

They found old bopa Lloyd in bed, where they knew she'd be, for it's where she had been ten years now. She looked now much the same to their indifferent young eyes as when she took to her bed never to leave it alive ten years previous. There were more of her relations than usual around her big four-poster bed in the biggest bedroom of the big old house. Those known as 'the Ebbw Vale lot' had come, children an' all, over in a brake to see old bopa Lloyd who had all that money and all them houses. The pig had been killed, and they had brought a lovely bit of belly-pork over for their dear old bopa Lloyd, and the son they were hoping to make a preacher out of they had brought over for his bopa Lloyd to hear with her own ears how well he could read from the Book. The news of the arrival of 'the Ebbw Vale lot', bearing gifts, had spread like wildfire through the district to the old woman's many relations, and from Dowlais, Penydarren, Cefn, Pentrebach and Troedrhiw they had hurried, each with a bit of something for old bopa Lloyd, who wasn't taking anything to eat or drink these days. So when Megan and Moriah arrived it was to find the old woman's bedroom like a fairground.

Old bopa Lloyd was ninety and odd years of age and as already stated, she was 'bopa' to ever so many; 'bopa', or 'boba', as some said, being the word used for 'aunt' in the Welsh of the place about this time. She must have been a great grand-aunt – if there is such a relationship – to some of the youngest present this evening. Mothers and grandmothers were picking children up to see old bopa Lloyd in her bed, where the sight of her almost frightened the children into fits. 'Don't cry, it's your bopa Lloyd,

lovely.' Cry the children did, and struggle to get back down on the floor where they would be free of the sight of her. Anyway, the children were held up each time to be frightened, for the old woman in a state of coma on the bed was thought to be rich, very rich indeed, how rich only the lawyer she always said – when she was able to speak – was robbing her, knew. Houses down the Tramroad, and houses over on the British Tip she owned. Then the house she was living in – dying in, more like – she had paid a lot of money for when the man who owned the brewery built himself a house in the middle of a big field which he walled around and called a park.

Anyway, bopa Lloyd bought the house cheap from him, but she made everybody pay the top-penny for everything they bought from her. 'All my life I've worked hard, and never wasted a penny,' she was always saying up to the time she went like she was now. Her husband, 'as much of an old crab as she herself', people said, started as a puddler's helper. When he came to be a puddler himself he took his barren young wife to work with him as his helper, and soon bopa Lloyd, young and strong in those days, was every bit as good a puddler as her husband was – and he was one of the best puddlers in Cyfarthfa works. But bopa Lloyd knew as much as he did about the formation of the puddled ball, and she was better on what was called 'the dolly' than he was. When he was bad for nearly a year, it was bopa Lloyd used his puddlers' tongs to draw the puddled balls of iron along the run to the setter, and she could swing the puddled ball of iron up on to the setter's platform – took some doing – as well as any male puddler, if not better than most. Then she was more daring than her husband in her stealing of pig iron to get bounty money for more puddled bar than any two men working together produced. Men said that she used to steal tram-wheels and engine-wheels to increase her husband's yield.

Anyway, only old Marged Ellis, who looks after bopa

Lloyd now that she's like she is, remembers her in those days. When the others claiming relationship first remembered her she was a woman of property going about collecting her rents. For forty years she went about with bonnet and shawl over layers of clothing. Always she carried two bags, one with a handful of gold in, silver in the other. These bags she carried in two pockets of the flannel petticoat under her skirt, and the money she always carried to tempt people to sell their houses cheap. 'Wait till you *see* the money for yourself,' she would say rising her skirt of rusty black to get at her petticoat pockets. Once she got a 'yes' out of her victims she marched them down to the lawyer's, who put the finishing touch on what she had started.

There was no need for her to scrape as she did during those forty years, for her husband he was promoted step by step until at last he was a puddling manager, and Crawshay of Cyfarthfa works thought the world of Ephraim Lloyd, dead now this many a year. But his wife, old bopa Lloyd, is still alive. There she is, blind, bony, and dirty with high-dry snuff in that big old bed of hers. Her lips all the time moving like if she's trying to count, a faint murmur might be heard coming from her mouth if the room was quiet enough for one to hear a pin drop. Her hands all the time opening a little to close a little. All her visitors round the bed looking down on her, Marged Ellis in the background with a faint but most ironical smile on her face. Her smile becomes more friendly when she sees Megan and Moriah enter. She beckons them forward, and unceremoniously she clears a way for them to follow her to the bedside. 'Out o' the way so's a body can move, an' take your old children from under feet. Like a fair-ground the place is - but I don't mean you, Megan fach - nor you, Moriah. If nobody bothered the poor old soul more than you do, then the poor old soul would have a chance to die tidy in peace.' She chuckled as waving a hand around to include all present with the exception of

the two girls. 'But they makes her want to go on living to spite 'em.' She leaned over old bopa Lloyd to shout into her ear: 'Here's Ann's two gels come to see you.'

'Eh?' Bopa Lloyd's voice seemed to come thin from under the bed. Marged Ellis sighed as she straightened up to shout at the assembled relatives both near and distant. 'Will you stop your old row for me to tell her who's come?' The relatives frumped and frowned as they lowered their voices to whisper one to the other their disapproval of the way old Marged Ellis, who was in no way related to the shrunken figure in the bed, bossed them – 'we, her relations, mind you' – about. 'We, her nearest and dearest,' they whispered. Again Marged was bending over the old woman, shouting into her good ear. 'Here's Ann's two gels come to see you.'

That voice again, coming so thin from so near the border over which was peace. 'Ann? Ann? Which – which Ann?'

Marged, after she had caught enough breath for another shout: 'Ann that married that Rhys Davies – the drunken old scamp as he is. You remember that Cardy – But remember or not, I can't shout any more for you to-day.' She straightened up again to say to those present: 'So it's just as well for you all to go about your business now – you two gels stay a bit, for you've only just come. Some o' these have been here since morning. Come on, off you go now. Eh?'

The mother of 'the Ebbw Vale lot' begged her in a whisper not to forget to tell bopa Lloyd something. She was pushed aside by the mother of the Troedyrhiew lot, who begged Marged to remember to tell bopa Lloyd that – 'Yes, yes, yes, I'll remember to tell her everything,' cried Marged, as she shepherded them all out of the room and house. Smiling, she returned to the two girls standing at bopa Lloyd's bedside. 'Now what do you think of that lot?' she asked.

The sisters smiled non-committally.

'Now let's see if I can make her know who's here.' After a glance down at the old woman she shook her head. 'No, it's wedi popi for to-day, I can see. She's sleeping. Well, let her sleep, God help her. All that lot botherin'—' She chuckled as she moved away from the bed to a loaded table. 'Let's see what they've brought altogether.' Forgetting the girls standing there she began examining the gifts brought that day, muttering a depreciative commentary as she did so. With a length of belly-pork hanging from one hand, and a knitted turnover shawl from the other, she looked across at the two girls and asked: 'What did you two bring for poor old bopa Lloyd?'

'We - we didn't bring anything,' said Megan.

'Who wants you to bring anything? These,' she said, waving the length of belly-pork towards some mittens, a bottle of elderberry wine, and much else that had been brought, 'these'll be none the better off for what they bring.' She went off into another muttered monologue. Moriah pulled Megan's skirt.

'We're going now, Marged Ellis,' said Megan.

'Go you, my gels. How's your mother, poor thing?'

'Oh, mam's all right - thank you for asking. Gets hard work to cetch her breath now an' then, that's all's the matter with her.'

'Isn't it hard work for all of us to cetch our breath now an' then? Look at her in the bed, God help her. The trouble she gets to cetch enough to sniff the pinch of high-dry I holds under her nose. An' that's when she'll go - I was telling the lawyer yesterday - was it yesterday? All them here to-day have made me I don't - but whenever it was - That's when she'll go, I told him. I'll be holding the pinch of high-dry snuff under her nose, an' her with no breath to sniff at it. Then she'll be gone. Ha, ha, an' then the fun will start. I hope the Lord'll spare me to enjoy it. All them who've been here to-day - you heard what that woman from Troedyrhiw said?'

Moriah was all the time tugging at Megan's skirt. 'Yes – but we're going now,' said Megan.

'Didn't I tell you to go?' said the old woman coldly. 'But what's your hurry?' she asked next breath.

'Oh – er, no hurry, Marged Ellis.'

'Yes, there is. Megan fach, if you don't go quick Moriah will be pulling a rip in your skirt. I could tell you two gels something that would – but go you,' she said, as she turned her back to them.

'Yes, Marged Ellis – an' good-bye now.' The old woman didn't say good-bye or anything, so the girls tiptoed out of the room and down the stairs and out of the house. 'Phew,' said Moriah, stopping outside the door to fill her lungs with the breath of life, 'the smell. An' the look of her there in the bed. Didn't she look awful?'

'No more awful than we'll look at her age.'

'Never will I look as awful as all that at any age,' said Moriah, stepping out. 'I expect the singing for the marble clock have started, an' the gels from our brickyard are no doubt thinking that we're not coming to sing after all. Come on, hurry, for goodness' sake....'

CHAPTER III

AN EVENTFUL EVENING

FOR an hour since half-past seven Ann had been standing in the picture of anxiety in the frame of her doorway. Thousands of coal-blackened men and boys had passed homeward from the pits both ways along the hard main road less than a hundred yards from her door, and hundreds of them had turned left and right off the main road towards her, 'but none of 'em mine,' she muttered as they entered other houses in the Row, went left up to the houses on the rise, or right down to houses along the Tramroad. The men who were hauliers in the seam her husband worked in had, a few of them, passed her door about eight o'clock. She knew them for hauliers, also knew that when the hauliers finished, the doorboys who opened underground doors for them finished at the same time. Then where was little Joe? Waiting down there in the dark for his father and his brother, Will, no doubt. Perhaps his father had sent word to Joe by one of the hauliers to wait by the door in the dark till he had finished his work at the coal-face in from the door a long way. So no doubt little Joe was waiting for his father and brother to finish, for 'em all three to walk home together. A quarter to nine, an' still no sign of 'em. Is this 'em now? Yes - is it? Yes, it is. Joe bach. . . .

They walked towards her now in the same order as they had walked out of her sight nearly fifteen hours gone. The father in front, the boy Will a yard or so behind his father, with little Joe a couple of yards behind his brother. They

walked heavier in the tread now than when they had hurried out of her sight into the early morning. Caked sludge on all their boots thick made the lift of legs a labour, and the trot had been taken out of little Joe. Yet he had to find a trot from somewhere to keep up with the long but tired lunge of his father's legs. So Joe, when he had lost a few yards of ground out of every hundred yards to be covered, made a desperate zigzag little gallop to make up the lost ground.

'How did you get on, Joe bach?'

'All right - out o' my way, woman,' growled Rhys.

'Yes - sit there, Joe bach. So you -'

'Put the bit o' taters an' meat, an' let the boy alone, woman.'

'Yes, yes - an' I've potched the taters with the potcher for you, Joe bach.' From the oven two plates, from off the saucepan full of boiling water on the hob the third plate heaped with mashed potatoes, with a pork chop atop o' the taters like an island in a sea of gravy. Loaf of bread of her own baking with the bread-knife near by to the right of the table where she could cut what was wanted without interfering with her pit-men's eating. Never in her life had she on the night of a working day sat eating with those who went out to work. Only on Sundays, and week-days when there was no work, was it the thing for her to eat at the same time as those who went out to work. Now she is cutting bread, opening food-boxes to let the smell of the pit out, sparing a drop of what little water there is to swill the taste of the pit out of two tea-jacks and one quart bottle. The others go on eating.

Dead-centre of the table there is a good twopennyworth of beer which fills the pint-and-a-half bottle. Off this bottle with the beer in it Rhys never once took his eyes, which seemed to be saying to the beer: 'All right, I'll attend to you in a minute.' But he did not bolt his food to get at it the quicker. He ate fast, but not chokingly. His jaw-sockets under his ears clicked with every bite. Ann

with her eyes fastened on Joe, who for the first time was sitting down to taters an' meat on a week-night with his father. He ate as though not capable of the labour of consumption and mastication. Every now and then he would with food in his mouth rest his jaws. 'Can I have a cup o' tea, our mam?' he asked.

'After food,' said his father between two bites.

'Er - er, yes, after food, Joe bach. Shall mam cut the meat for you?'

'Let the boy alone, woman.'

'Yes, Rhys.' P'raps Rhys was right, after all. Make a man of her Joe. Then, in front of her eyes, Joe was asleep in the chair with his mouth open full of food. 'Joe bach,' she cried. 'Hoy, wake up,' shouted his dad. The child jumped and almost choked himself with a gulp of food. Will laughed. 'What are *you* laughing at?' said his father sourly. Will hung his head as his father with one hand pushed aside the empty plate as reaching for the bottle of beer with the other hand. A dull glow of pleasurable anticipation appeared to change in more ways than one the tired man. The black of his face had grey channels along which sweat had poured for a day and a quarter, and it was in those grey channels that the glow of satisfaction managed to impress itself briefly. Then the look in his eyes as he poured beer from the bottle into the pint mug Ann had jumped to place ready at his elbow. 'They gave you good measure this time,' he murmured, looking at what was left in the bottle after he had filled the pint measure. 'Yes, Rhys, good measure this time,' said Ann, with her eyes on Joe. 'Shall I pour the boys a cup o' tea now, Rhys?' He was drinking. Half-way down he drank before taking the pint measure from his lips. After he had filled it again with what remained in the bottle, he said: 'That boy haven't finished his taters an' meat.' 'I can't eat more, dad,' said Joe. 'Then let me have it, our mam,' said Will, who had cleared his plate. Ann looked at Rhys, who, mellowing now, nodded consent.

Joe's leavings were pushed across for Will - a hungry-gutted boy if ever there was one - to gollup up. Ann poured tea for the two boys, and a cup for herself as well.

'P'raps you could eat a bit of my teeshun-lap, Joe bach,' she said. 'Teeshun-lap' was her Welsh name for flat-cakes of her own making. But Joe couldn't eat teeshun-lap either. 'Let him wash first to go up to bed,' said Rhys, feeling kindlier after another long drink o' beer. 'Yes,' said Ann, fetching the tub from outside. She didn't manage to half fill it with all the water there was for wash-ing. 'Come on, Joe bach, let mam wash you all over to go to bed.' 'He'll wash hisself all over,' growled Rhys. 'But he's never washed hisself all over before.' 'Time he did. Strip an' wash your upper part first same as you've seen me an' your brothers do, boy - Let him alone, woman,' he roared as Ann started helping Joe to undress. She jumped away from the boy, who took off his coat, waistcoat and shirt. Stripped to the waist he knelt over the tub soaping the flannel, and his thin body bent breaking the heart of the woman made to stand back from him, her baby, not eight till the Saturday coming. The little handful. . . . Rhys in the arm-chair now smoking his pipe. Big man he is. . . . 'Put plenty soap on the flannel, Joe bach.' 'He knows what to do, woman.' 'Yes Rhys.'

Slowly the child washed white his drumstick arms. Then he lowered his head to wet it before soaping it. With the points of his fingers he rubbed the lather over his head, for the palms of his hands were chafed sore by the rope he had been pulling at through a day and a quarter of a day. 'Now your face, Joe bach,' said his mother encouragingly. 'Can't you keep your mouth shut, woman,' said Rhys. The boy rubbed the soapy flannel over his blackened face, and soon the front of him from his head to his navel was more or less clean. He stood up with hands held out for the rough towel his mother reached him. 'Out of the way,' said Will, 'for me to wash my upper part now.' 'No, let him finish

to get to bed out o' the way,' said Rhys. 'Where are those two gels, woman?'

'Gone up as far as Penydarren to see how old bopa Lloyd is.'

'Oh, ay.'

Joe stripped to wash his lower part; and didn't he look funny in the tub with one hand working the soapy flannel up and down his black legs, and his other little hand trying to hide his tuppence the way he had seen his father and brothers hiding theirs when washing their lower parts in the tub before the fire. It was little he had to hide with his sore hand from his mother's eyes, but he was a man now, and what other men did he had to do, even though he was about eighteen inches only from his feet in the water to his middle out of it. His mother she stood back looking at him, looking at him naked, naked and small and tender and lovely, rising lily-like out of coal-blackened water. His father he smoked his pipe, and the smoke from the father's pipe made rings like smoked silver aureoles around the head of the slender child.

After he had dried his legs the mother dropped the shirt she had been holding ready over his head. His father was beginning to doze in the arm-chair with his pipe in his mouth so Ann picked her baby up and carried him upstairs to bed. 'There, lovely boy,' she murmured. 'Sleep now, sleep now.' He was asleep. 'Mam's boy,' she murmured, bending to kiss him.

Downstairs she went to tend to the others, who both washed themselves all over in the same drop of water that Joe had left dirty for them. It was all the water there was, and after they had used it the tub was pushed under the table, for the water would have to do for washing out in the morning before the water would come to the tap in the middle of the Row. Will went up to bed, but Rhys, with only his Welsh flannel shirt and drawers on, sat smoking in the high-backed arm-chair, beginning to brown the second of the two clay pipes Ann had asked for when fetching

the drop o' beer in the bottle from The Black Cock. She could have got them in any public-house, for clay pipes of all shapes and sizes could be had for the asking. Ann sat on the three-legged stool making an old long trousers of Will's do for Joe to go tidy to the pit next morning. She had a lot to do yet. Pockets to sew on inside Joe's coat for him to carry the new food-box and tea-jack she had bought from the tinker-gipsy woman, clothes to put to dry around the fire, pit-boots to clean the sludge off to take the shoe-oil which was the only thing that would soften them to let the feet in early mornings.

The knees of Will's trousers wanted patching too – the way that boy ripped clothes about. Nothing wanting doing to Rhys's pit-clothes this night, thank goodness – oh, dear. Rhys in the arm-chair had let his clay pipe fall out of his mouth to smash on the stone-flagged floor. ‘Good job I brought two,’ she said. ‘Ay,’ he said in a yawn. ‘Sleep came over me an’ – better go to bed. Where did you say them two gels went?’

‘Up to see how old bopa Lloyd is.’

‘Oh, ay.’ Upstairs he went without any more words. He knew she had work that would keep her down for at least another hour, women's work in which he was not interested. He looked to have everything dry and patched tidy to put on every morning to go tidy to his work in the pit. Sometimes it was morning before she could finish the patching and cleaning and oiling, but that was none of his business. Up an hour after him, down an hour before him – well, what are women for? After I've gone to work she can go back to bed for a bit, can't she? He spread himself all over the bed, and after one long sepulchral relaxing groan of a yawn, he was fast asleep.

Downstairs she went on sewing. Phew, how close it was. Open the door a bit. Where are those gels? ‘There, Joe bach,’ she said to the trousers she had made do for him. ‘Long trousers for you.’ She put it to hang on the line across the fireplace. ‘Now them pockets to carry your box

an' jack same as other boys in the work.' She turned the wick of the oil-lamp up to have more light to see to thread the needle. Again and again she tried. 'These old eyes o' mine. Now, this time. No.' Try and try again. Joe could thread it like winky for her - got it at last. She picked up the coat and the piece of patching. Where are those gels? Time they was . . .

Only two of the half-dozen couples of singers left to decide between. 'Oh, I'm melting away,' cried Sophie Morris, her large man's handkerchief sopping wet from wiping the sweat off her face. No wonder, she standing there jammed fast for hours in the middle of the crowd that overflowed from under the canvas roof of the Cheap Jack's place of business out on to the main Merthyr-Dowlais road. Upwards of a thousand people, mostly women and girls, had that night assembled at the Cheap Jack's, which they thought was as good as a circus or any theatre.

A theatre for a season, and circuses here to-day and gone to-morrow, had previously occupied the site which the most popular of all Cheap Jack's had now been occupying for months past. Already he was the talk not only of Merthyr and Dowlais, but also of the district for miles around, and on pay-Saturdays people came over the mountains from other valleys with gold and silver money to spend at his place, for wasn't he a universal provider. 'You can get anything an' everything at the Cheap Jack's - 'cept beer, of course, for he haven't got a licence,' the people said.

A most remarkable man was the Cheap Jack. Before going on to talk about him personally, a word about the premises he called his 'place of business', which, fit-up arrangement though it was, was nevertheless worthy to be called a 'place of business', for it was where the Cheap Jack did as much real business as any three of the district's leading tradesmen. Yes, on these premises, ladies and gentlemen.

The back, or pine-end of the place, was formed by the three long supply wagons. They stood broadside to the

crowds attending the nightly sales. The sides of the wagons nearest the people were collapsible, coming down to form part of a platform, from which there was an extension with a piano stage-left. The sides of the supply wagons farthest from the people had been left up locked and bolted to form – for the outside – the pine-end of the premises, and – for the inside – a long display counter along which goods were stacked and hung on hooks. Grandfather clocks stood two each side the platform, one downstage, the other backstage, as though on guard over all the other more lowly articles. Imitation marble clocks, wooden-housed smaller clocks, clocks set in china frames, and a great variety of watches of which the Swiss watches had a clear majority, these were the clock and watch department. Brooches and rings the jewellery department – no gold wedding-rings to be had here. Drapery, clothes, boots, china and earthenware, bedding, blankets, sheets. Cutlery, accordions and concertinas – ‘listen to this, friends. Here’s an instrument that’ll make ‘em dance at your wedding. Listen to –’ Wooden pipes mounted with real silver for Sunday smoking. Pictures and texts in beautiful frames, texts in both Welsh and English. Ironmongery – ‘look, just look at these table-lamps. Ever see anything like ‘em, friends. Here, I’ll tell you what –’ Curtains, candlesticks. ‘take some o’ these things out o’ my way. I shall have to *give* a lot o’ this away so as to have room to move, to breathe. Will some o’ you gels who are getting married Christmas come an’ take some o’ this stuff out o’ my way – no, not now. I’ll tell you when. . . .’ Lozenges for coughs and Cholera. . . .

Yes, the Cheap Jack had a cure for the old Cholera which came every now and then to take hundreds of people to their graves out of the way. There was no end to the cures for the old Cholera. Druggists sold powders to cure it, old women compounded herbs to cure one of it, many who had never been to chapel before ran to chapel when the old Cholera was about, and the Cheap Jack he sold the lozenges

which he said wouldn't hurt one if so be that it didn't cure. More a preventative to render one immune than a cure once it got hold of you, was what he maintained, so he sold tons of those lozenges which the people chewed and chewed whilst the sale went on. Those in the district who were members of the Latter-Day Saints had their own secret way of dealing with the old Cholera when it came, but their way of dealing with it was reserved for members only. But as most of the people stricken by the old Cholera were far from being saints, latter-day or any day at all, the cure in the custody of the Latter-Day Saints of the district was not available to them. The doctors warned the people against all the quack remedies they went after when the old Cholera was about. Powders, herbs, lozenges were no good, the doctors said. Cleanliness, they talked about. Said that the graveyards crammed with dead above the level of the houses in which people alive were living atop of each other - Of course, most of our chapels had their graveyards, in front of the chapels some of them were, others were at the back. Not much bigger than a couple of full-sized blankets some of the chapel graveyards, and hundreds if not thousands buried in 'em. Now, of course, with the Cefn Cemetery opened, the doctors didn't have the chapel graveyards, many of them side of the road and in the middle and above houses, to talk about. So they talked about our privies over cesspools, irregular and inadequate supply of water, pigsties and stables and ash-heaps and stagnant pools and casks for pigs' wash stinking in front of houses, and all this in such a big place so overcrowded, the doctors said. . . .

Well, perhaps there was something in what the doctors said, for it was a big district - the fact that it had to have two Members of Parliament proves that it was a big district. Then look at the number there was working in Merthyr and Dowlais. In the Guest works and pits of Dowlais employment was provided for seven thousand five hundred men, women and children. The Cyfarthfa works and pits owned by Mr. Crawshay provided employment for another six

thousand men, women and children, and the Plymouth pits provided employment for several thousand men, women and children. Then the brickyards, foundries and factories an' shops an' things provided employment for thousands more, so it must have been a big district. A stranger standing on the mountain looking down would never believe that so many people lived in so few houses. But they did and the living were more crowded in their houses than the dead were in the chapel graveyards. Those who had passed away within the last five years had twenty-one acres of as lovely country as anyone could wish to be put to lie in. Up above the Cefn under the trees in which the birds sang all the day long, up there where everything was so clean, sweet and lovely, they were taking the dead out of the sight of the works and pits many of them had been worked to death and done to death in. The living remained badly-housed under the shadow of Cholera, and the doctors who were all Company doctors swore under their breath when visiting Cholera cases in Company houses. Everything was 'Company' owned and controlled. Schools, houses, doctors, teachers, clergymen of the Church of England, canal, railways, banks, souls. So the Company doctors didn't dare open their mouths too wide about the housing conditions of the place.

From hovels strong hairy-chested breadwinners went to their work in the morning without as much as a pain in the belly, to return dying from Cholera in the evening – so no wonder the people in the Cheap Jack's chewed his Cholera lozenges. Twenty-four hours was all the Cholera required to bring down the strong to the graves – the stronger they were the better the Cholera liked 'em. Diarrhoea – and the men from the furnaces, men from the rolls, men down the pits, men everywhere running like mad to open their trousers time and again. Crawling home with cramps in the limbs – 'What in the name o' God is the matter with you, my John, my Tom, my Dick, my Harry?' Cold – clammy – 'O-o-o-o-oh, run for the doctor,'

who when he comes can only shake his head. Sound the alarm along the stinking brook and river banked both sides with houses crowded. The timid with no more than a touch of bellyache crying in the night: 'It's got me, the old Cholera's got me.' Stricken houses - 'keep away from them. But I must go an' see my mother. Awa-a-a-a-a for your life.' Doctors on their rounds not fearing, here and there a doctor having to pay the price. Brave Brodie and other doctors without sleep for many nights put to sleep for ever an' greater love hath no man. . . . Men whose cramped limbs slow them down clinging to the iron standards of gas-lamps avoided - 'only Thou, O God.' Mother of nine with her shawl over her head twitting down quiet in one of the Tramroad's dark stretches, the people hurrying by - 'only Thou, O God.' A brickyard gel on her way home from work with the other gels puts her hands to her stomach and moans: 'I must go somewhere again,' she trots like the drunken in one direction, the other gels flee her the other - 'only Thou, O God.'

Before it spends itself the old Cholera strikes two thousand this time again. Doctors with the help of God manage to save nearly seventeen hundred souls alive. Two hundred, which is ten per cent of two thousand, are taken quickly, the other hundred die of the complications, chief of which is fatal Uremia. Rails Russia wants more and more of, so we'll have to get more hands from somewhere to replace those taken by the Cholera. Irish from Ireland, Cornishmen from Cornwall, Staffordshire men from Staffordshire, men from everywhere are invited to come and share our great prosperity, to earn good wages - 'an' bring your families with you.' They come to stoke our furnaces, to roll our rails, to hew our coal, to live two families in one house, to keep beds warm all the year round by the system of shift-sleeping - and here are many of them chewing Cholera lozenges in the Cheap Jack's on towards the end of another dry summer. They are uneasy, for this is the kind o' weather when the old Cholera might visit 'em again -

p'raps it's not gone from here. Sure to be though, for they have heard talk that it is over in Tredegar now, and most of them believed that the old Cholera, like a man, could not be in two places same time. Ninety-nine of every hundred now assembled at the Cheap Jack's are of that belief.

Sweating under the canvas roof most of 'em, for from the pine-end formed by the three end-to-end wagons the wooden side-walls started to stretch for about fifty yards towards the street. From the wooden side-walls wooden stays from both sides rose to meet over the high pole-spine, from which canvas roofing was stretched both ways to the top of the wooden side-walls. The entrance was the wide-open mouth of the place, across which a stout canvas curtain was stretched and securely tied when the nightly sales and entertainments were ended. When it was lighting-up time an Indian file of naphtha lamps were hung on hooks fixed into the high pole-spine, and the naphtha lamps they spilled light – hot oil as well they spat occasionally.

From the platform, like sun-rays if horizontal, three plankways extended fifty yards over the heads – well, level with the heads – of the standing audience. One way going half-right, one straight out, and the other half-left. These three plankways were covered with sacking material to make them safer for the three salesmen, the singing salesmen who had to run them with articles out, and money back to the Cheap Jack, whilst the sale was in progress. 'Running the plank,' was what this part of their duties was called.

The Cheap Jack's name is Shon Howell, but seldom does anyone call him by his proper name. 'The Cheap Jack', most people call him. He can talk. Welsh and English, classic and colloquial, and all points between in both languages. People said that he must have had a lot of schooling, though nobody had ever seen him write. But they had heard him talk, play the piano, and sing better than any of his three singing salesmen – and they were

pretty good. He used to sit at the piano with his head back an' his eyes shut as his confident fingers found the required blacks and whites of the keyboard. He could play anything. Little enticing bits which might be called 'prelude to a sale' he could play on Jews' harp, mouth organ, accordion and concertina.

People who had lived in Tredegar before coming to Merthyr to live said they remembered this Cheap Jack years before when he was only singing and 'running the plank' for Richard Rees, of 'mind your number one' fame. Richard Rees was the great temperance Cheap Jack, who before the mighty sales delivered temperance orations, supported by the ministers of religion of the places visited. Shon Howell had learned the business with Richard Rees, but he was not like his old boss a temperance man. He, Shon Howell, has done very well indeed since he left Richard Rees to 'mind his number one', which was the advice his old boss was always giving people. Well, Shon had minded his number one, for by this time he had the three big vans, his fit-up place of business, money in the bank, and a fast-trotting pony to pull him about in a smart trap during the day when not at business. Then he employs a staff of four. Three singing salesmen to help him draw the crowd first, then 'run the plank' afterwards. Also a middle-aged woman to write down in a book the things sold each evening.

Yes, it was wonderful the way the man had got on. People who had suffered under the truck system when children, flocked now to hear the Cheap Jack's wholesale condemnation of the local tradesmen, who, so he said, were worse than the company shops had been. Revealed by comparative methods how those in his audiences were being 'robbed', that was the very word, by local tradespeople. Then he was most accommodating. 'Pay me a shilling now, an' I'll put it by for you. Yes, an' when you come for it there'll be a wedding present from me, too.' So he was well-liked *and* respected, yes, and trusted, even by those

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who couldn't nor wouldn't swallow all that he said about our local tradesmen cheating us.

Before business commenced each evening there was about an hour's first-class entertainment, for his sales force, the three chaps running the plank for him, were each of them talented artistes as well. Tenor, bass-baritone, and 'comic' respectively. Their gagging when running the planks was in itself worth what one paid for most of the articles for sale. So they – with the boss's items for good measure – each evening provided free the best entertainment in town. Well, as good as free. If the clock one bought didn't go very well after a bit, and the things another bought didn't come up to our Cheap Jack's description of them, if his cough and Cholera lozenges didn't act, p'raps it wasn't his fault after all, for he didn't make 'em, an' them he bought them from in good faith may have taken advantage of the man like many another has been taken advantage of before this.

Whilst he was conducting a sale, always in his shirt-sleeves and with his bowler-hat on, he – But the bowler-hat. Yes. He was a handsome chap, tall, an' looking like one who might grow fat in years to come, black moustache, no more than thirty years of age, looking like a guardsman after finishing his time, and always a smile – But the bowler-hat. Very little hair under it, that was the reason he was never seen without it.

The way he handled money was a pleasure to watch. Nearest to him, below the rostrum, he had a cup for the gold, a basin for silver, and a bowl for copper. 'Coining money,' some said, meaning that he was making much profit. Our local tradesmen said much worse about him, but what they said didn't worry Shon Howell, the Cheap Jack, who only laughed when people came to tell him what local tradesmen were saying about him, especially after he had started to sell furniture as well. . . .

'Friends, it's getting late,' he was saying. 'Indeed it is,' sighed Megan beside Moriah on the platform, she thinking

more of what her father might say and do if waiting in his sober senses, than of the marble clock she and Moriah stood a chance of winning. 'There's only these two couples left to decide between - but I want the four couples who've been eliminated by popular vote to stay, for there's not one o' them going from here without a prize of some sort.' After the applause with which this gesture was greeted had died away, he continued like a man in love with the sound of his own voice. 'Haven't we had a grand night, friends? As good as a night off for me and my staff. We look forward to these weekly competitive nights, for nothing gives me an' my staff greater pleasure than the developing of the talent of which there is such a wealth in our midst. Wants finding, that's all. Plenty of talent in Merthyr and district, an' once a week I provide you with an opportunity which is all many of you require. But how many of your local tradesmen provide you with such opportunities? Why don't you answer, friends?' 'Why don't you stop talking an' say who's to have the clock for us to go home before my father is here after us?' Megan under her breath said. 'Huh, but we don't need an answer.

'All your local tradesmen are prepared to do for you is to sand your sugar an' - But never mind 'em. Once in a blue moon any of you can appear on the stage of the Temperance Hall to sing with the choir - or by yourselves if you like. But only when there's an Eisteddfod there. But here, on my platform, as good a stage as any, you get your chance at least once every week. Nobody barred. Welsh, English, Irish, Jews - whatever you are this platform o' mine has been and always will be open to you. Welsh nights, English nights, Irish nights an' mixed nights like to-night, you've had, haven't you? Here's an Irish couple and a Welsh couple on this platform now waiting for your decision - which I know will be a fair one. For if anybody knows what singing is, then it's you, friends. That's my honest opinion, friends. - This is not the Market Hall or the Temperance Hall where singers are tied to test

pieces. Here you can sing what you like, dance as you like, play as you like on whatever you like – then you yourselves the judges, you yourselves to decide who's to have the prize. But it's getting late, friends.'

'I shall be going an' he can keep his marble clock if he don't hurry up,' Megan whispered to Moriah, who was delighted to be up there on the platform in front of so many people. 'I'm easy,' she said like the Irish. 'Then I'm not,' said Megan.'

'Now, come forward,' said the Cheap Jack, beckoning. First he put to the vote the two Irish sisters whose father when at liberty unloaded more iron ore in Dowlais works than any two Welshmen could in double the time. The gels' father was now in Cardiff jail again for temporarily reducing the strength of our police force by three, a sergeant and two constables – all of whom are now out of danger. So there were a number of sympathetic votes for the two daughters of such a man.

'Right,' said the Cheap Jack after he had counted the hands upstretched for the Irish sisters. 'Now you two.' He stared at Megan as she went forward with Moriah to the edge of the platform. 'H'm,' he hummed appreciatively, placing his hand not fatherly, to rest on her shoulder. In the centre of the audience there was a dense block of upstretched hands around Sophie, who had been leading her brickyard gels to mass and block vote throughout. Hands thick up around and about the solid brickyard block in the centre. 'You've got it easy,' said the Cheap Jack, smiling into Megan's eyes as he pressed her shoulder. 'Take your hand away,' said Megan, out of the side of her mouth quietly, blushing. The Cheap Jack chuckled as he removed his hand and addressed himself to the audience. 'There's no doubt about it,' he said, pointing to Megan and Moriah. 'The marble clock is theirs.' Sophie led the applause in which all present joined, even the two disappointed Irish gels still on the platform applauded. 'You stay where you are,' the Cheap Jack said to them,

'for I've got a substantial prize for you. First let me present this solid marble clock to the winners.'

The clock itself had a gold-gilt centre about the size of a five-shilling piece, around which on a creamy white background hour-numbers in black. The veined blue-black marble – as the Cheap Jack called it – was constructed around the clock like a temple, with two steps up to where the two pillars flanking the clock started, and it had like a roof sloping upwards to meet in a point a few inches above where the clock said twelve. 'Will you,' said the Cheap Jack, smiling, speaking not to Moriah but to Megan, 'will you send for me when this clock needs regulating or something?' Smiling into her eyes in a way that made Megan feel ashamed up there in front of all those people.

'Give the clock if you're giving it,' she said through her teeth.

'Certainly,' he said, nobody hearing him in the row the audience was making. 'Where do you live?' he asked, still holding the clock, not giving it.

'In the Row across the bridge,' said Moriah, smiling and pointing towards the back of the platform. 'Our house is the one straight in front after you go over the bridge –'

'What odds to you where we live?' said Megan, who had more of her father's dislike for what he called 'old show' than her sister had. 'Are you giving the clock or not?'

'Certainly,' he said again. 'Here you are.' Once he had handed it to her his hands rested over hers for a moment. 'It's a nice clock,' he said, looking into her eyes, his bowler-hat one-side on his head. If Megan hadn't the clock to hold she might have smacked his impudent face, for he was, she felt, stripping her with those eyes of his all shining. Over the clock she was holding like if it was a baby or something, she took in his exterior confusedly. The lily-white shirt, his silky black moustache, the thick gold chain reaching from one pocket to the other of his waistcoat. In the body-heated atmosphere of the place

which had been crowded for so many hours of a hot, late summer's evening the man's presence on top of everything was overpowering. 'Come, Moriah,' she said faintly, moving towards the steps leading from the platform to the littered earth on which the crowd stood dense and steaming. 'Be careful,' he said, with that hot hand of his again giving her the hot shivers as he pretended to be helping her down the steps, at the bottom of which Sophie, with the other gels of the brickyard all wildly excited about her, were waiting for a close view of the marble clock. From hand to hand it went, the Cheap Jack up on the platform all the time eyeing Megan and smiling down, with the other five couples that had sung waiting impatiently for their consolation prizes. 'Give it now for us to go home with it,' said Megan, and after she had it returned to her she asked: 'Are you coming now, Sophie?'

'Not until I see what he's giving those other gels. You two gels did sing lovely — Now what's he going to give them two for a start?' she said as the Cheap Jack beckoned the two Irish girls forward to where he stood with something in paper in his hands.

'Come Moriah,' said Megan.

'Let's stay to see —'

'I said come. Do you want our mam to have a row an' p'raps worse for shielding us later than now?' said Megan, with the clock in her arms, forcing her way out through the crowd, Moriah following grumbling.

Their mother with her finger to her lips in the frame of her doorway lit from the back with the warm light of the fire and table-lamp, from the front by the colder light of the moon.

'Where have you been?' in a whisper faint to nothing.

'Look,' from Moriah, pointing to the clock in Megan's arms.

'Shush. Quietly now. Not a sound to wake your father.' All inside, and the mother closing the door so quietly, and turning the key in the lock so carefully, her eyes the while

slanting upwards from over her shoulder to the top of the stairs. The remainder of the conversation between her and her two daughters was by means of signs and lip-reading. Lamp turned low – puff. Darkness. Tired hands feeling for each step of the stairs, bare hands and stocking feet a step at a time to bed. She smiled relief into the dark as she heard her Rhys's snoring. Undressing slowly, a little moonlight coming through the nine-inch each way window they had never been able to open. There was enough moonlight for her to see the shape of her boys on the bed, her baby Joe, next the wall. 'Lovely boy,' her lips shaped. A word in prayer – 'Oh, God, take care of him in the pit to-morrow, and always. In the name of the Lord, Amen.' Then, lowering herself on to the edge of the bed to sleep a bit and watch the time for the man to get up in the morning.

CHAPTER IV

MUCH ADO ABOUT A CLOCK

HAD Rhys Davies been anything like a man, a man other men could talk to, he would have heard about the marble clock long before he did, for it was the talk of the place for best part of a week before he heard about it. A week during which Ann brought the clock from under the bed the gels slept in as soon as their father had left for work, to place it on the mantelpiece where the gels could have a good look at it before going to the brickyard to work. During the day Ann's neighbours in the Row came in to see the marble clock looking so grand on the mantelpiece, and her four daughters-in-law with their children came to see it as well. All but one carrying babies in the shawls around them and the babies. Owen's widow, the English gel who was talking about marrying again, had no baby in the shawl now, only the two little fatherless boys one each side her, holding on to her skirt. Miriam, Elias's Welsh wife, had her three children with her. Llewelyn's Irish wife, Norah Delaney as she was before Llew' married her, had the three children she was determined to make Catholics of with her, and Sam's wife – the only one of Ann's daughters-in-law that took drink – was there with her two children. Eileen Murphy she was, before Sam married her, and she was the only daughter of Mike Murphy that some called 'Big Mike' and others called 'Mad Mike', for he was both big and mad when in drink. Fighting on the street with his shirt off – that was why he got sent down to Cardiff jail where he is now. Eileen

lived with her Welsh husband and her two half-an'-half children in Company Row, next-door to her parents' house. Here she is now at her mother-in-law's with the other daughters-in-law, only one of whom, the Welsh one, Miriam, would dare to be where they are if Rhys Davies was anywhere about. But now he's down the pit out of the way.

'Has he seen it?' Norah asked, as they were all having a cup o' tea together after the view.

'No,' said Ann, 'not yet. I puts it back under the gels' bed before he comes from work. But I'm watching my chance to tell him, watching my chance to cetch him when he's in a good temper. P'raps to-night when he comes home -I'll see how he'll be.'

She had to study him and carefully choose the time to tell him about things. By so doing she had managed to win his grudging permission for little Joe to go for a while to St. David's School. And p'raps to-night, she was thinking after her daughters-in-law and their children had all gone, p'raps to-night after he have finished drinking the drop o' beer I'll have ready for him, an' he's sitting there in the arm-chair smoking his pipe, I'll up an' tell him about the clock. . . .

Little did she know that, deep down under the ground, he was hearing about the clock from the haulier who had been off on the spree for the best part of a week. This haulier came with his horse to 'change' Rhys. That is, to 'change' the empty tram his horse was pulling, for the loaded tram stood on rails far-end of Rhys's roadway. The empty tram he left spragged up out on the heading, whilst he drove his horse light into Rhys's roadway to fetch the loaded tram out. Having hitched the horse to the loaded tram and driven out of the roadway and down the steep heading, the haulier returned to help Rhys and Will to push the empty tram around the parting and into the roadway. For iron trams high-sided are heavy, especially when caked all over with sludge. Yes, they took some

pushing round a parting, and into roadways turned off headings going to the rise, as this heading was.

After they had pushed it around the parting, and into the roadway, the haulier sat down gasping for breath. Using his black and hairy forearms as sweat-mops around his face, he said: 'Now the Vulcan Hotel beer is coming out. Pushing my guts out to help you colliers to get your empties on to the coal. You'll have to make a tumbling-place for empties in the roadway, then we wouldn't have to push 'em in off the heading.' He chuckled ruefully. 'What damned fools we are, Rhys. Losing time to guzzle beer on strap, then come down here to sweat it out like this.' As rising to go after his horse he said: 'Well, no danger of you sleeping late any morning now that you've got that big marble clock.'

Rhys, with a mandrel in his hand to hew coal with, stopped as he was crawling forward between rock roof and flooring towards the coal, stopped like a man shot, dropped his mandrel before rolling himself out from under the rock roofing to go to where the haulier was standing. 'What marble clock are you botherin' about?'

The haulier laughed. 'What marble clock – as if you didn't know, didn't know that them two gels o' yours . . .'

The haulier went on to exaggerate what took place at the Cheap Jack's the night of the singing for the marble clock, and as he was saying it fine, Rhys stood not looking at him, but up at the rock roof of the roadway, to which he said every now and then: 'Oh, ay. A clock – for singing. Oh, ay. Ay,' not loud enough for the haulier to hear with his ears, but it was loud in some ways all the same. 'Oh, ay. . . .'

'P'raps I'd better go after that horse before Hugh Nannie's after me again,' the haulier said after he had started more than he knew. Off he went. Like a six-foot prop stiff in the middle of the roadway Rhys stood muttering: 'Oh, ay.' Presently he turned to speak to the boy, who was busying himself fixing the wooden peg he had shaped with his

dad's hatchet to hold the crossbar of the iron tram firmly in position to hold the crossbar-lumps of coal 'Will,' Rhys said like if he was choking.

'Yes, dad.'

'Did you know about this?'

'About what, dad?'

'About – about what this flaming haulier said?' He pressed his two fists hard into the sunken pits of his eyes as roaring like a lion in a trap. 'About your sisters singing in that place with old Irish an' all the riff-raff of the place, your sisters making an old show o' themselves, an' of me, their father, in front of – Speak, boy. Did you know anything about it?'

'N-n-no, dad,' lied the frightened boy.

'H'm. Right. We'll see,' his father muttered ominously. He came forward sideways from behind the empty tram, and mounted the two-feet-thick step of rock flooring. With a mandrel in his hand he crawled on his belly forward under the rock roofing, forward to where the two-feet-thick seam of coal was sandwiched between rock roof and floor. With the mandrel he savagely attacked the coal, which was hard to get from where it clung to the rock like a frightened child clinging to its mother, like hair to the scalp, like a girl to her lover going to his death, like all and everything to whom and what parting is difficult it clung to the rock. Now Rhys seemed pleased to find the coal clinging to the rock, for he was grinning as he attacked it, accompanying his blows with jerky sentences such as 'I'll clock 'em. Make simple o' me. Me their father. In front of the old Irish. Make an old show in front of –'

'A sharp mandrel,' he snapped, turning on his side to slide the blunted mandrel back to Will, who came forward with a sharp mandrel, with which his father, streaming with sweat, continued his fight with 'the unkind coal,' as the colliers spoke of the coal which would not readily leave the place where for ages it had been forming and resting. Rhys Davies vented his rage on the stiff coal.

Below the level of ‘the drop o’ drink’ which in his opinion was his one failing, there was in Rhys Davies the Puritan spirit of the old chapel deacons. The spirit of the deacons of Pontmorlais Chapel, who as good as excommunicated members for taking their children walking on Sundays. Frowned upon those who brushed their hair back off their foreheads. The leader of the singing they drove out for daring to introduce new methods of singing. Moses Davies the deacons drove out of Pontmorlais when he began talking about having a harmonium to accompany the singing of hymns.

Then across the road, in Zoar Chapel, the deacons drove out the leader of the singing, drove out Rosser Beynon and those who had with him in Temperance parades worn medals, which was vanity not to be tolerated. ‘Old show,’ such as Rhys Davies hated.

Madly he went on working until he told the boy to gather up the tools about five o’clock. ‘Gather ’em up?’ said the surprised boy, ‘why, it’s only –’ ‘I know what time it is,’ growled his father, crawling out from under the rock roof. ‘We’ve finished for to-day.’ In the roadway behind the tram loaded with coal he stood upright in the six-feet of height to peel off his singlet soaking wet with sweat to stuff it into his empty food-box. Now stripped to the waist he picked up his tea-jack to pour what weak cold tea there was left in it down his dusty throatway. ‘Hurry up,’ he said to the boy, reaching for the flannel shirt hanging on a rail-clamp made to serve as a clothes-peg from one of the side-timbers. After he had dropped the shirt over his head he unbuckled his belt to allow his trousers to slip down whilst he tucked the end of his shirt under his fork before pulling his trousers back up and fastening the belt with the big brass buckle over it. ‘We’ll surprise them to-night,’ he muttered, ‘we’ll –’ He chuckled grimly. ‘Yes, when they reach home from the brickyard they’ll find me there. Yes, *me*.’

The second ‘*me*’ caused Will to tremble. So that’s why

we're going out a couple of hours earlier than usual. God help our Megan an' Moriah. 'Where are those blunt mandrels an' wedges?' said his father. 'Here,' said Will. With a mandrel apiece under their arms, a wedge apiece heavy in pockets, they went dressed back the roadway and down the heading. Little Joe at his door was surprised to see his dad and brother so early. 'Come,' said his father. 'But the hauliers haven't finished.' 'Come, when I tell you — let 'em tend to the door for the rest o' the shift themselves.' 'Yes, dad.'

With his two boys following Rhys was legging it back to the pit-bottom when Hugh Nannie was coming to meet them to see what was keeping the hauliers. The pit was waiting for loaded trams of coal to swallow. 'Did you see them hauliers anywhere? — an' where are you going this time o' day?' Rhys brushed him against the side-timber as passing without a word. 'H'm, dumb-band, is it?' murmured the surprised master-haulier, who when he saw little Joe cried: 'Hoy, Rhys, what are you taking this boy away from his door at this time o' day. He's paid to tend that door till the hauliers have finished travelling an' — humph, still dumb-band.'

The master-haulier was quite right. Joe was paid a half-crown a week to tend to that door until the last of the day-hauliers had driven the last of the unshafted horses of the day-shift past him on the way to the stables hewn out of the rock near the pit-bottom, where many of the horses would just stay long enough for a bite and a sup before being 'tacked' — which was the hauliers' word for harnessing — by the night-shift hauliers to work through the night again. Day and night — night and day, the horses picked up their tired greasy heels. 'The noblest animal, gentlemen. . . .' Quite. Anyway, little Joe was on his way home much earlier than usual, trotting faster than usual to keep up with his father who was lunging his long legs forward one after the other faster than usual.

His father stopped a yard outside the house on the little

baili of the house, the door of which was wide open for him to see Ann and two of her neighbours with their backs to him admiring the marble clock on the mantelpiece. ‘Oh, ay,’ he said, that’s all, but it was enough to turn the three women about like if it was a strong spring had turned them about – one – one-two. Then his eyes like magnets drew the two neighbour women out past him with their heads down silent, leaving Ann standing like Lot’s wife struck stiff in the middle of the stone-flagged floor. ‘Oh, ay,’ breathed Rhys again as he went into the house to put his food-box and tea-jack on the window-ledge. He slowly turned to take the marble clock off the mantelpiece to carry it out on to the bit of a’baili outside, where he stood balancing it for a moment or two on the palm of his huge right hand. Then he threw it as easy as though it were a cricket ball – or a quoit, say – across the road and brook to smash into smithereens against the wall far side the brook. ‘There,’ he murmured, brushing his hands together as though it were filth he had been handling. Then he went into the house and shut the door. The two neighbour women who from their doorways had watched him throw the clock to smash against the wall far side the brook ran together to the little iron-railed bridge over the brook to look down on the handful of broken chalk-like material which was whitening the yellow trickle of water into which it had fallen after smashing against the wall above. ‘That was no more marble than I am,’ said one. ‘Plaster o’ Paris, more like,’ said the other. ‘Marble or whatever it was or wasn’t, he’s an old rip of a man. Yes, an’ if he was mine . . .’

Ann inside the house had at last managed to speak.
‘Rhys – Rhys, you shouldn’t have –’

‘Put the taters an’ meat, woman.’

‘I haven’t got it ready, for –’

‘Then get it ready.’

‘Yes – but it was wrong of you –’

‘Get it ready, I said. Will, fetch that tub in. We can

wash all over whilst your mother's getting food ready.' He began to undress. Stripped to the waist, he poured first hot water out of the saucepan into the tub, then cooled it with cold water out of the bucket. Down on his knees to wash his upper part. Ann with trembling hands trying to peel potatoes. What would he do - why didn't he say something? His upper part he had washed and was wiping when the two gels came singing from their work. 'Oh, hull - er, hullo,' they spluttered, looking at their half-naked father. He didn't as much as look at either of 'em, turned his back on 'em to hang the towel on the little cord-line across the fireplace. Then he rounded the table to turn the key in the lock of the door, next he slowly with one foot pushed the tub under the table out of the way. He was clearing the deck for action, as one might say. Ann, forefinger and thumb of trembling right hand pinching her lower lip - she knew. The two gels with their backs to the window - they knew. The two boys other side the table standing with their backs to the wall - they also knew. For they had all been spectators at these games when one or other of the brothers now married had had to suffer punishment. Deliberately, without shouting, hurry or fuss, Rhys took off his leather belt to lay it flat along the length of the table, where it drew the eyes of the mother and her children. The man - the ~~strange~~, the cruel man - carefully rolling the tops of his duck-cloth pit-trousers and flannel drawers until shaped like a life-belt to hold up his trousers and drawers at the waist unbelted. Little Joe's eyes now fixed on his father's navel, in and around which there was still enough coal-dust to make the navel look like a little black button on the white surface of flesh.

Ann's hands now hanging down, mouth as though open to have teeth out, eyes like saucers, staring, waiting, watching to see which end of the belt the man's strong right hand would descend upon. Moriah clutching Megan's shawl, feeling blows already. Megan steeling herself as best she could for what was to come. The hand is coming down to

pick up the belt, and as it does, Ann, like winky, rounds the table to stand with hands outstretched before her two gels.

'No, no, not the buckle-end, not the buckle-end to my gels, Rhys,' her voice like the clown's that time in Cook's Circus. 'No, not the buckle-end on my gels, Rhys Davies.' Who is Rhys Davies? Joe wondered. 'No, please sir, not the buckle-end.' Who is 'sir'? Joe was thinking.

'Out of the way, woman.'

'No, not for you to use the buckle-end on my gels, Rhys Davies – not the buckle-end. All my boys you drove out with that, Rhys Davies, but you shan't drive my gels out with –'

'Out of my way, woman, before –'

'Not for you to use the buckle-end,' she screamed, her face with a look on it that made Joe whimper. The big man moving down on her, on the table the bread-knife alongside a four-pound loaf of her own baking. The knife is in her hand –

'Don't, mam fach,' from the gels behind her.

'No, no, our mam,' from the boys behind the man, Rhys Davies, recently called 'sir' as well.

'No, not the buckle-end,' the mother was madly chanting, as on the balls of her feet she stood doll-like menacing. But something was happening, and the man Rhys Davies could see it happening. His strong right arm, his belt-arm, one might call it – 'I'll give you a belting' – grew as limp as the belt now drooping to the floor. His strong belt-arm with which he had belted his sons from home – oh, the belttings he had given them – now so limp, and the man, Rhys Davies filled to overflowing with fear, fear not so much, if at all, of the knife she held, but of the look in her eyes: round-open like saucers.

'Not the buckle-end, sir, for if you do, I'll tell my husband, my husband, Rhys Davies, I'll tell, an' he'll –'

Then the flame behind her eyes, behind the windows of her eyes, went out. For one utterly blank moment she

stood before she crumpled. As the knife dropped from her nerveless hand the belt dropped from his and he caught her as she was falling. 'Ann, Ann annwyl —' In his arms, like a baby, her face like the white-washed and windowless pine-end of a cottage.

'You've killed her, you old —' Moriah burst out crying.

Rhys Davies shook his head sadly and slowly, feeling the irregular breathing of the wife in his arms on the bare skin of his left breast, just above his heart. All looking so helpless now that she was like she was; he, Rhys Davies, the big man, more helpless than any. Sick eyes fastened on the blank face of the woman he was holding in his arms like a baby, and like a very sick man he presently said: 'I'll take her up an' put her on the bed. Will one of you gels run to fetch the doctor, please? The other finish putting food for the boys.' Upstairs he went bearing his cross.

•
About eight o'clock in the morning it was when a priest, who was seated high on the driving-seat of a dusty trap, pulled at the reins to bring the pony he was driving to a standstill outside the gates of Cardiff jail. After a glance at the iron-studded double-gates, the priest, who was clean-shaven, and about forty years old, lowered his head back between his shoulders to look skywards. Whilst looking up at the sky he several times sniffed in the morning air with noisy appreciation.

'A grand morning,' he murmured, rejoicing in the pride of it, and also in the good news he had heard the night previous from the Cardiff priest with whom he had stayed the night. Oh, it was grand news his brother in God had told him. Yes, it was more than good to hear that the young lord, after whose father the docks of the place had been named, was now seeking admission into the Catholic Church. His mother, the Lady Sophia, had whilst alive done her utmost to lead the Irish of Cardiff away from the Catholic Church. Now, 'God be praised for it,' here was

her only child on his way into the holy Church which his mother had tried to lead the Irish of Cardiff away from. This was grand news to take back to the thousands of Catholics away up in the valleys between the hills.

The Cardiff priest with whom he had stayed the night had talked a lot about what this would mean to the Irish of the place. Already many men whose fathers had been shipped over from Ireland during the hungry forties to help make the docks, were doing well for themselves, said the priest. Not handling picks and shovels, or wheeling barrows the way their fathers had to, but doing well in business in the town, and down the docks. 'Better business men than Catholics many o' them,' sighed the priest living amongst them in Cardiff. 'But 'tis the money they're making so easy that's turning their heads. For now that the railways are with the canal bringing more and more coal and iron down from the valleys in the hills beyond. . . . 'Tis like manna it descends on the people here, manna that doesn't go bad overnight. 'Tis fortunes some o' them are making. All they have to do is pass on what your people up in the hills beyond are all the time raining down on us here at Cardiff.' A most talkative man was the Cardiff priest. Talked half the night, he did, about the ships in the docks making Liverpool look to itself, and the fortunes waiting for men with heads on their shoulders. 'For the stuff your people in the hills are raining down on us would long ago have buried us if we were not quick passing it on.'

The priest from the hills seated in the trap sighed. Yes, 'the stuff', that was how they referred to the coal and iron the canal and the railways were day and night taking down to the growing town of Cardiff. He saw with the eyes of his mind Bridget Murphy and the other Irish women in Company Row twenty-five miles behind Cardiff, and Bridget's husband whom he had driven to the gates of the jail in Cardiff to meet. Bridget herself talking irresistibly. 'Your reverence, unless you're there at the gates to meet

Michael, 'tis back there he'll be before we have him to look on after all these months. For when about a dozen o' them policemen tore him out o' the dock to throw him down ~~the~~ stone steps leading to the cells — where Michael well ~~knew~~ what was waiting him — 'twas then he swore to God in his rage to kill the first policeman he met whenever he was free to do it.' Bridget had sighed. 'An' a Cardiff policeman's as good as a Merthyr or Dowlais policeman for the purpose Michael has in mind, which is to pound all the warm blood out o' one of 'em, an' not leave him till he's colder than the clay. Then what'll I, a lone woman with Wicklow beyond the sea away from me, do without him in this country with its smoke an' its noise?'

A lot more Bridget had said to make the priest hire the pony and trap — for he hated trains more than the Devil did holy water — to drive to Cardiff to meet her Michael. Here he is waiting at the gates, and no sign of them letting the men out yet. So the priest takes out of the tail-pocket of his coat not any holy book, but the current week's issue of 'All the Year Round', to start the new serial story that was that week commencing. But before he had got far into it the small gate which formed part of the right-hand big gate, was opened to allow some men to duck their way through it to freedom. Their close-cropped heads they ducked to come out through the little gate, through which the first to appear was an oldish man whose face was criss-crossed with blue coal-scars. He carried a little bundle under one arm, and thankful eyes he lifted to the morning sun that was the free sun before he moved quickly off. 'Drunk and disorderly, a month without the option of a fine,' was how the priest mentally weighed him up — sending a blessing, not heard, yet perhaps more than useful after the man. Next two coloured men appeared, who showed white teeth as they smiled incredulously at each other before hurrying away so happy. Next a youth who looked back defiantly through the little gate before moving off swaggeringly. Next a neatly-dressed, middle-aged man

whose appearance made the priest say, 'in an office'. Last, but not least physically, anyway, Michael, as the priest called him. 'Hoy, big Mike,' some would have said, others would have said: 'There's mad Mike,' but the priest he said, 'Michael'.

'Yes, your riverence.'

'Jump up here beside me.'

'I've me ticket for the trane, your riverence.'

'Ah, light your pipe with it.'

'I have no pipe, your riverence.'

'I have, an' 'bacca. Jump up, man. I'm driving you home to Bridget.'

Michael climbed up into the trap, and with a shake of the reins the priest started the pony moving. He handed a new clay pipe, a box of matches and an ounce packet of shag tobacco to Michael. 'It's Ringer's you like, Bridget said.' 'It is,' said Michael. After he had been smoking a while he said, 'You've no whip, your riverence.' 'No, Michael, no whip. There's no hurry.' The sight of a policeman standing on the corner of a street made Michael bite through the stem of the clay pipe and roar 'May the curse of God descend on me if I pass that policeman —'

'Shush, easy, Michael — your pipe was a bit long,' said the priest who had caught it when falling. '**Here, finish** your smoke. This place grows. When I was last **here** some years ago —'

'May the Devil himself ride me to hell if I keep me hands off them who's trod me sore under their heels in a cell after they'd bound me. May I be eaten by the crows if I leave —'

'Hold your tongue, man, an' take a look at that green field beyond, for it's few green fields you'll see once we're up in the mountains beyond Pontypridd — we'll have something to eat an' drink there. An' take that ugly look off your face, man. Am I driving you back into the jail, or home to Bridget?'

'How's she been, your riverence?'

'In no want. Dan Delaney's seen to that.'

'Dan Delaney's a man.'

'Dan Delaney's a fine man. This pony's moving better than he moved when coming down yesterday. Maybe it's because we're on the way home.'

'Home,' murmured Michael, his face working. The small pigs' eyes in his big head were fixed on the Garth Mountain, thick with trees from its foot to its head in the morning mist. 'Home.' Tears in the eyes of the head fantastic of an outsize carnival monstrosity. Jutting, scarred eyebrows heavily fringed with hair mixed red and grey. Big nose bashed and bent, ears like donkeys' ears out of which hair sprouted. Heavy and wild his moustache over the great gash of a mouth in which the few big teeth he had left showed like rusty iron monuments. Hands like shovels hanging scarecrow fashion outside his legs. Such a sight dropping tears about. 'Your riverence, over twenty years I'm this side the water, an' 'tis a wreck them years have made o' me. Unloading the ore, an' banking the rails, melting before furnaces, an' never a sight of the ould country.' He was crying out loud now.

'Ay, but 'tis not the work that's wrecked you, Michael – though you're far from being a wreck, man. It's your divilment that's your trouble, not the day's work you're well able to do. Mountain fighting, street fighting, drinking, an' lying about drunk in gutters in all weathers – But listen to me preaching.'

"Tis God's truth you're saying, your riverence. But I've had to stand up to these Welshmen – one of whom came courting me daughter behind me back, an' took her to a registry office to be married like a savage by a bit of a clurk.'

'She could have married worse. Sam Davies is a good husband to your Eileen – maybe too good for her that swallows all the drink she can get. Her husband having to go every day down the dark pits under the mountains, an' her drinking –'

'I'll bate the hell out of her, your riverence, if she - '
'Look to yourself, Michael, then maybe - Never mind, we'll stop here for that drink you're dying for.' He drove the pony into the yard of the public-house which stood under the Castell Coch, or 'The Red Castle', as the English say.

• • • • •
'How's your mother to-day?' said Shon Howell, the Cheap Jack, throwing a silver sixpence to the boy who had with two stones scotched the wheels of the trap the Cheap Jack sat so lordly in.

'About the same - thank you for asking,' said Megan from where she stood in the doorway.

Her neighbours both sides were out on their doorsteps nodding meaningfully one to the other, and as much as to say, 'There he is again.' This had made Megan feel ever so ashamed at first, and for long after he had started coming like a real gentleman in his high-wheeled trap, wearing driving-gloves an' all. But now she didn't care, neither did the Cheap Jack, who talked out loud for all in the Row to hear.

He started coming the day after her mother had the stroke in mind and body that had made her like a baby just born, helpless and blank upstairs in bed. That night had finished her, that night when she rose the bread-knife to her husband, who was now a tidy man too late. That night after the doctor had been and gone Rhys Davies had no sleep, sat side the bed looking at what he was mainly responsible for bringing about, listening to the woman gone baby again, babbling. Didn't know him any more, didn't know anybody on this side any more. The morning so empty came before he had as much as closed his eyes, and Megan in her nightdress came up the stairs. 'How is she now, dad?'

'No different, my gel. You stay home from the brick-yard to mind her for me.' Before leaving for work he said to Megan: 'If she do get her senses back an' me not here,

tell her that I've taken Joe back to work butties with me,
tell her he's not by hisself minding the door. Tell her –
Do you think she'll come better, my gel?"

'After she have lied quiet a bit, p'raps.'

'Ay, that's it, a bit o' quiet, an' then – I'll find Will
another butty, an' have Joe with me instead. Mind to tell
her that, my gel.' He went out of the house and across the
bridge with the two boys at his heels, and his huge body in
his clothes was like lengths of wood in a sack. Only once
after that did he darken the door of a public-house, and
that was to pay what was chalked against his name behind
the door leading from a bar to the top of the steps leading
to a cellar. He was that funny thing, 'a changed man',
poor in spirit and gentle. No longer was 'the drop o'
drink' between him and his God. There was much more
than the drop o' drink between 'em now, he felt. Each
night as soon as he returned sober from his work he went
upstairs to see if she'll know ~~she~~ to-night. She didn't.
P'raps after I wash all over she'll know me. She didn't.
Each day to the pit an unknown man, each night to his
bed an unknown man. He slept with Will, Joe sleeping
with his two sisters in the downstairs bed. His married
sons now coming with their wives and children to see their
mother, who no longer knew any of them. The Irish wives
and their half-an'-half children they came, for nobody was
afraid of Rhys Davies any more.

And the Cheap Jack he came that first day Megan stayed
home from the brickyard to look to her mother, the day
Moriah went to the brickyard by herself for the first time
since ~~she~~ and Megan had started going to the brickyard
together when they were little gels seven years ago now.

You could have knocked Megan down with a feather –
about four o'clock that afternoon it was, for the children
after finishing school for the day were coming home to the
Row – when she saw the Cheap Jack drive his trap over
the bridge to stop before her door. Looking out through
the window she was as he turned his fine pony's head uphill,

and called down to a boy: 'Scotch them wheels, boy.' The boy put a stone behind each wheel, the pony rested, and the Cheap Jack he flicked a silver sixpence through the air down to the boy for scotching the wheels for him. 'Cetch,' he cried, and there was the boy who had never before handled silver money afraid to pick up the sixpenny piece off the ground. Laughing the Cheap Jack was. 'Pick it up, boy, it won't bite you.' Whatever did the man want? Megan was determined not to open the door to go and find out, for she didn't want to set the neighbours talking. Dressed better than ever — driving-gloves an' all. Fine horse an' trap. Like the gentleman from Penydarren House sitting up there with the reins in one hand an' the whip in the other — Heavens, he's knocking our door with the handle of his old whip. Again. Better open the door before he frightens our mam worse than she is up there. Blushing like anything she opened the door to ask: 'What do you want?'

He smiled down on her appreciatively, for, fair play, she did look nice after finishing her work an' changing an' doing her hair an' all. She had a clean apron and her brooch on. He was trying to find a name for the colour of her massed hair. Like toast when done just right, was the colour he thought of in a hurry. 'Hullo, eos fach,' he said, no doubt thinking to get the right side of her by calling her 'eos', which is Welsh for the bird the English call a nightingale.

'What do you want?' she asked again soberly.

'Well, I've heard about last night, about your father smashing the clock I presented you with — But can't I come in a minute?'

'Certainly not.'

'Now don't be nasty, gel, for I only came across to see how you was after him beating you so unmercifully last night.'

'Who told you that?'

'One o' the gels living in this Row.'

'Then tell her she's a liar, for my father never as much as laid a finger on me.'

He laughed. 'I can see you've got a bit of a paddy – Now, don't go in for a minute, good gel,' he cried as she was about to. Transferring the whip to the hand already holding the reins he fished up out of a pocket a tiny watch and a thin silver ladies' chain. 'I've brought you this instead of the clock he smashed. Here's the latest things for ladies –'

'You an' your ladies. Don't you sit up there making fun o' me.'

'Making fun? This watch is eighteen-carat gold, my gel, and this chain is silver stamped every link.'

'There, now you're talking like what you are.'

He chuckled. 'Like a Cheap Jack, is it? Anyway, here you are instead of the clock. You'll have to make a little pocket for the watch in your bodice – just there above your heart, eos fach. Here, take it.' She stood where she was in the doorway glaring up at him. 'All right, hold your apron open and I'll throw it down into it.'

'Like you threw the silver sixpence to the boy for scotching your wheels, you cheeky old – old –' She turned to go in and close the door after her.

That was the first day, when his visit was for the people of the Row a first-class sensation, but by now he was, so to speak, stale news. By now the neighbours knew what time to expect him each afternoon, and it was a toss-up whether he or the children home from school came first. By now *Megan*, with her father's consent, was wearing the Cheap Jack's watch and chain on Sundays, and the neighbours were looking forward to the day when the Cheap Jack would 'be 'lowed to cross the door', as they said. 'Now that she wears his watch an' chain on Sundays,' Annie Morgan of the third house down from the top-house said.

The women were lining up with their buckets and pots and pans near the tap, for the town-crier had been round ringing his bell, and shouting that the tap would be giving

water for an hour before being turned off again. The water was off most of the time, so when it did come on for an hour or two a woman had to be there to 'cetch' her drop o' water or go without. It was no good a woman going shopping or anything just then, and coming back to find the water 'off' again, for then it would be a case of begging from neighbours, who had little enough for themselves. 'Can you spare me just enough water to boil the few taters in?' 'Why wasn't you here to cetch water same as the rest of us?' was the reply the foolish one usually got, but she usually got the drop o' water all the same. So they were lining up ready for the drop o' water when it came to the tap.

'His watch?' said Bronwen Rees, who lived in the bottom house but one, 'it's no more his watch than mine, for it's the prize she won by singing, the prize he gave instead o' the clock her father smashed. So it's her own watch she's wearing.'

'Then if the watch an' chain she's wearing is instead o' the prize,' said old Maria Banks, 'how is it she an' Moriah don't wear it every other Sunday? For they sung together for the prize – wasn't I there to hear 'em sing?'

'What's the use us play ring-a-ring-a-roses?' said Liza Phillips, 'when we know that it's Megan the Cheap Jack have got looks on; an' if she's got any sense she'll take him before he cools off. Anybody can see that he's mad about her now. If only I was young again, an' a man coining money the way he is came every day in his trap like a gentleman after me, it wouldn't be long I'd keep him waiting.'

'Yes,' said old Maria Banks, 'but how do you know he wants to marry the gel tidy? Men who go from place to place like him more often than not lives tally with women.'

'If she plays her cards right, he'll marry her,' said Liza Phillips confidently. 'Then it's her carriage an' pair she'll ride in. You've all seen the way he sits in the trap looking at her every day. A man with that same look in his eyes could be made to do anything a gel wanted him to do.'

'Shush, here she comes to cetch her drop o' water,' said

Bronwen Rees as Megan came towards them with the bucket hanging from one hand, and the earthenware pan on her hip the other side. ‘How’s your poor mother with you to-day, Megan fach?’

‘About the same – thank you for asking.’

CHAPTER V

CONVEYANCES

ONE day the Cheap Jack, sitting up in his trap looking very glum, said to Megan, who was standing in her doorway looking up at him: 'I'm shifting, bag an' baggage, over to Aberdare Monday.' Then he asked her again if she would come for a drive with him in the trap on the Sunday. Up as far as Cwmtaff to see the town's fairly new waterworks. She shook her head as she had many times before. 'Why not, gel?'

'People will talk.'

'Let 'em talk.'

'Then Sunday. What about my chapel an' Sunday-school?'

He sighed. 'Surely you can have one afternoon and evening off to go somewhere before the winter comes.'

'The deacons of our chapel don't think much of you.'

'I think less of them.'

'Our deacons are good men.'

'And I'm not?'

'I didn't say that.'

'Some of those deacons you're talking about are tradesmen, and they dislike me because I sells what they sell cheaper than they do.'

Megan shook her head. 'No, it's because you don't go to any chapel and Sunday-school deacons don't like you. What can you expect?'

Shon sat trying to whip flies away from above his pony's ears. 'I'll tell you what. If you come for a drive with me

Sunday, I'll go to chapel with you next time I come back to Merthyr to sell. Ask your father if you shall come, tell him that you can't leave your mother any other day but Sunday.'

Megan considered this. 'P'raps being as you're going Monday - can our Moriah come too?' He considered this, frowning. 'No, she'd better stay to look after your mother.' 'Dad'll look to mam. He'd rather, an' she's better with him than with Moriah - or anybody for that matter. Moriah works all the week in the brickyard - '

'If she comes she'll have to sit behind.'

'She'll be a-willing to sit anywhere as long as she can have a ride.'

Another sensation for the Row when, soon after dinner on the Sunday, Shon came with his pony and trap to fetch Megan and Moriah. 'There you are,' said Liza Phillips, nodding right and left to the neighbours out on their door-steps to see the trap off. 'It won't be long now.'

Shon drove smartly off over the bridge, out on to the main road, and down to Pontmirlais Square, where he made his spirited pony plunge and rear to attract the attention of those on their way to Sunday-school with Bibles under their arms. Moriah half turned in her seat at the back to clutch Megan's arm. 'It's all right,' Shon assured them, turning the pony right for the Brecon Road. 'Bit fresh, that's all. Getting on with the new Drill Hall,' he said, pointing left with his whip at a place in the building. 'Steady, Prince.'

'Is that his name?' said Moriah, who was as excited as anything on this, her first ride in or on any sort of conveyance.

'Yes - sit quiet if you don't want to fall off. I'll let him have his head once we're clear of the houses. Then you'll see him move.'

'He's moving plenty fast enough for me now,' said Megan, whose last ride was when her mother carried her in her arms.

Shon was like a boy at a tea-party, talking and laughing. 'That's where the Cyfarthfa Band practises twice a week,' he said, pointing with his whip at the Lamb and Flag public-house. 'Fine band it is.'

'Yes,' said Moriah, 'we heard it play from our house that time it was playing in the big field for the sports. An' once we heard it practising in that public-house too - 'member, Megan, when we came this way that time to the singing festival down Cae-pant-tywyll Methodist Chapel - there it is, see it, there's the chapel now.' She from her place at the back was pointing down to where the chapel seemed to be in the works, as did the houses around it. But Shon, ignoring her, was pointing half-right with his whip at Cyfarthfa Castle. 'The castle with three hundred and sixty-five windows,' he was saying to Megan, 'one for every day in the year.'

'Our house got two, an' the upstairs one we've never been able to open,' said Moriah flippantly.

'Fine place,' continued Shon. 'Cost some money to build. Money that came from there,' he said, pointing with his whip down left at the works in which stokers were working what they called the long week-end. 'Talk about money - Yes, where there's dirt and smoke and fire, that's where the money is.'

'Then why is it you're moving your show over the mountain to Aberdare? an' leaving the money that's to be made here?' said Moriah.

'Stop pushing your head between me and your sister.' Then he laughed. 'Show? is that what you call my place of business? Perhaps it is. Well, it's not more money I'll make in Aberdare, for there's no more money to be made anywhere than in this place. But I'm sick of the same faces. . . . Must have a change sometimes, must keep moving.'

'Have you got much money?' Moriah asked.

'See that pony?' said Shon, stopping the pony on the Cefn Bridge.

'What's stopping us?' said Megan.

'Then you can see his front legs in Breconshire, and his back legs in Glamorganshire.' He touched the pony with the whip.

'Front legs in - How can that be?' said Moriah.

'Because it is!'

'The man's sure to know, Moriah,' said Megan. 'Have you had much schoolin'?' she asked Shon.

'No, not a lot.'

'What's that?' Moriah asked, pointing.

'The viaduct they're building.'

'What's a viaduct?'

'Can't you see? Like a bridge, only bigger to cross the road, river - everything under it. Then trains go over it.'

'Yes, our dad was saying something - or was it our Will?' said Megan.

It was a stiff pull for the pony uphill through the Cefn, so Shon got down to lighten his work by walking. By the time they reached the new cemetery gates the pony was steaming. 'Better let him cool off a bit,' said Shon. 'Come on down a minute.'

'No sooner said than done,' said Moriah, jumping down on to the hard road. 'Our Owen who was killed in the Gethin explosion is in here,' she said lightly. 'I wonder what part? We gels didn't go to the funeral when they was all buried together that time - '

'We'll have tea at the Millers' Arms,' said Shon.

'Is that a public-house?' said Moriah.

'Yes.'

'A public-house where they sell tea?'

'Don't ask an' ask all the time, Moriah,' said Megan.

Moriah frumped her face and said: 'Easy to see that I'm not wanted.'

'Don't talk so dull,' said Megan.

'Come on, up you get,' said Shon.

They soon arrived at the public-house which for the past

half-dozen summers had been doing excellent business. The place was crowded with people who had come by brake and trap from Merthyr to see our new waterworks. Shon, after seeing to the pony, returned to have a word with the landlady, who laid tea for them in one corner of the old-fashioned kitchen. Moriah could not take her eyes off the sides of bacon and hams hanging from hooks fixed in ceiling rafters. ‘Look, look at all that pigs’ meat,’ she said. ‘Isn’t it lovely. What if Martha James the mid-wife who comes round for the wash only seen all that lovely pigs’ meat.’ What a tea – better than any tea-party tea, Moriah thought it. Two sorts of bread and butter, two sorts of tart, and a loaf of cake, and as much tea as you had a mind to drink. Moriah drank four cups and ate herself stiff. ‘Isn’t tea nice when you haven’t got to put it?’ she said, wiping the sweat off her face. ‘You stuffed yourself shameful,’ said Megan when they went together to the place off the landing upstairs. ‘A wonder you haven’t burst your stays. Goodness only knows what the man that’s got to pay’ll think.’ ‘Come on, eat a bellyful, wasn’t that what he said?’ ‘Yes, but not to bust your – Come, an’ try an’ behave an’ keep your mouth shut from now on, there’s a good gel.’ ‘Stop talking like if you was our mam. Easy to see I’m not wanted.’ ‘Will you – Oh, there he is waiting.’ ‘Still with his bowler-hat on like when he was having tea an’ all. I wonder do he sleep in it?’ Megan stopped Moriah’s breath with an elbow-dig. ‘Come on, then,’ said Shon. He led the way out of the crowded public-house on to the hard road, along which they walked for some distance before Shon stopped to point. ‘There’s our new waterworks.’ ‘Oo, it’s bigger than the Goitre Pond where all the Merthyr people go to drown themselves,’ said Moriah. ‘Not *all*,’ said Megan, looking at the expanse of water. A rippled lake in the quietude of Brecknockshire. Away in front Brecknock’s Beacons over which Megan had heard that it was a sight to see the sun rising, or setting, she wasn’t sure which. The

birds out here made more noise, she thought, than the birds around Merthyr did.

'What a place to live this'd be in the winter,' said Moriah. 'No people, no - no anything.'

'The people are all gone to where the dirt and the smoke and the money is,' said Shon. 'More fools them, I sometimes think.' He ended with a sigh. 'Why then,' said Megan, 'did you come from a place like this in the first place?' He nodded his head. 'Let's go and sit up there under the trees for a bit.' Up the rising ground right of the road they went, Moriah saying that they could see all there was to see off the hard road. 'Then stay you here on the road, me and Megan are going up there to sit,' said Shon. 'You won't catch me staying down here by myself,' said Moriah. 'Afraid?' said Shon. 'Never you mind what I am.'

She was afraid of all the 'emptiness' she felt around her. She was of the narrow shut-in places, where the houses, oh, so crowded, were in rows. Colliers' Rows, Paddies' Rows, Company Rows, rows which shared a tap and a couple of privies over cesspools. Out here for the first time she was missing the mixture of smells for one thing. Missing the narrow street, along which chapels challengingly faced public-houses. The crowded street, which she liked to push along on Saturday nights and on Sunday evenings after chapel. Pontsarn where the tea-parties were held was not as quiet as this place, for at Pontsarn a gel was always within a hec, cam an' high of the stinking crowded place one was used to and felt so much at home in. 'No,' she said, after another look around off the higher ground on which the three of them were now standing, 'I should die if I was put to live out here - or go out of my mind, which would be worse.'

Shon, who wanted to talk to Megan, said: 'Why don't you go and pick blackberries or something?' 'Blackberries are nearly finished. Anyway what'd I pick 'em in?' He handed her his white pocket-handkerchief, which was about

the size of a sheet for a baby's bed. 'If there's no blackberries, there's plenty new-nuts.' 'Shall I go looking for nuts?' said Moriah to Megan. Megan considered the question as Shon threw himself down and began plucking grass to chew at. 'If you like,' said Megan, 'but don't go far.' 'No fear,' said Moriah, moving off.

'Afraid to be alone with me?' said Shon, looking after Moriah going through the trees.

'Why should I be afraid of you?'

'Then sit down.'

She turned her bit o' best skirt up behind to sit demurely on her flannel petticoat, to sit like if a man was there to take her picture. 'Why don't you take that old bowler-hat off?' she said, noticing the red mark it had made when his forehead had been perspiring. 'Dad says his head goes awful bad when he only wears his bowler-hat to a funeral an' back. He don't like 'em at all, can't a-bear 'em, but he must wear 'em - an' a sham-front as well - to be the same as the others following in a funeral.' Shon took off the bowler-hat, and now that he was bald-headed in front and pretty far back for her to see, his eyes were saying: 'Well, what do you think of me now?' She could see that he wanted her to say something, so she said what she was thinking. 'Nothing to be ashamed of,' she said. 'Our 'Lias haven't got much hair in front.'

'I wish I was taking you with me to Aberdare to-morrow.'

'What would I be doing in Aberdare?' He didn't answer, went on plucking grass. 'We could get married,' he presently said.

'Now you're joking,' she said.

Moriah from somewhere in the trees cried out: 'Not much blackberries, but any amount o' new-nuts.'

'An' even if you're not joking,' continued Megan, 'it's no good you talk to me about getting married.'

'Why, don't you like me?'

'I don't dislike you - but that's got nothing to do with it. There's our mam fast in her bed, like a baby she is.'

Can't do a thing for herself. There's not a man in the world I'd leave her for the way she is.'

'What about Moriah? Can't she look after her?'

'No. Moriah's all right, but she's a bit wit-wat. It's me dad looks to - But there, you was only joking, wasn't you?'

'Perhaps,' he said, turning over on his back.

'Have you got a mother?' she asked after a bit.

'Dead - and my father. He died as we were bringing horses over the Black Mountain to Waun Fair one year. So I stayed over here in the dirt. I could handle horses, and from Waun Fair I walked down into Tredegar, where I started driving a horse in one of the pits there. Not for long though. Only for about a year before I began singing and running the plank for Richard Rees, the temperance Cheap Jack who works the Monmouthshire valleys. After not quite three years with him I started on my own hook and - well, here I am, minding my number one, as old Richard Rees was always telling the people.' He chuckled. 'Old Richard made hundreds sign the pledge - Listen to her singing.' Somewhere in the trees Moriah was letting her round young contralto voice spread all over the place. 'A fine voice she's got,' said Shon. 'That night when I heard you sing together - You ought to have training, for it's you're the best singer of the two. If you was married to me - '

'It's no good you talk.'

' - you should have the best teaching money could pay for. For I've any gods'-amount, and there's plenty more to be had - '

'Here's Moriah coming,' she said, rising to her feet.

The child, Joe, had been working as butty to his father since the time his mother had taken to her bed, and gone what the neighbours called 'simple'. So now Rhys Davies had had all his sons in turn as butties in the pit, but it was only Joe that had had him as a father as well in the pit.

To the other five, Owen, who was killed in the Gethin explosion, Llewelyn, Elias, Sam and Will, he had been just a butty like any other man, a butty who was more than a bit of a nigger-driver; but now to Joe he was most considerate, called him 'Joe bach', which was more than any of the other brothers had got from him. So Joe's mother by going 'simple', had done more for the one she had called her 'baby' than ever she could have done for him by remaining what people call normal.

The other five sons Rhys Davies had made efficient workmen of in a hard and cruel way, but Joe was being taken the other way. 'Everything done by kindness,' like the man in Cook's circus said after making animals do tricks. So no wonder Joe liked working butties with his father better than minding a door. For when minding a door in the dark what is there to see and learn? Very little. Now with his father he was finding it most interesting. His father hewing, loading, boring, blasting, timbering, laying rails, using this tool and that tool. A mandrel, sledge and wedge, a hatchet, the churn and drills for boring coal, the sledge and chisel for boring rock. Joe would hold the candle for his dad to have light to bore the rock with the sledge and chisel. His father with the chisel in his left hand, hitting it with the sledge in his right. After each blow a quarter turn of the chisel to bring out of the hole being bored the powdered rock that whitened his dad's moustache. Some of the powdered rock he must have swallowed. Forty years he had been boring holes with hammer and chisel in rock, and holes with churn and handle, bar and drill in coal. So in forty years he must have swallowed a lot of powdered rock and coal-dust, and now that he was not drinking any beer, he was having trouble with his bowels; had to drink lots of senna tea now that he had stopped drinking lots of beer.

The big bangs little Joe was thrilled by. After his dad had finished boring the hole in rock or coal, though it wasn't often he had to blow coal from there with powder.

He preferred coaxing it from there with the point of the mandrel. But rock was not often soft enough to be 'ripped' with the big bottom mandrel that Joe called 'the anchor' because it was so heavy. So the rock flooring which his dad called 'bottom' and the rock roof his dad called 'top', had to nearly always be blown up, the 'bottom' – or down, the 'top' – with blasting powder. After his dad had blunted several chisels by boring into the rock a 'hole' from two feet to a yard long, he was all white with powdered rock like a baker in the world above with flour. Joe when holding the light in a place where there was not much air, and most of the little there was foul, had to fight to keep awake, and to help fight the sleep he sometimes counted the blows his father struck on the chisels he blunted one after the other, and threw aside to go up to the blacksmith, who in the blacksmith shop on the pit-head sharpened the colliers' mandrels, wedges and chisels, and tempered them as well. Sometimes Joe counted over a thousand of his dad's blows with the sledge on the heads of the chisels before tiring of the game. Then how many blows had his dad in forty and odd years struck? He gave it up.

'There, that'll do now,' his dad would say, after he had measured the length of the longest chisel's hiding-place in the rock. He measured with his hands, counting each hand as six inches, two hands one foot, and so on. And when the 'hole' was far enough to please him into the rock, he would fetch the tin in which he kept the blasting powder, one of the new safety-tins, the lid of which was an outer cover for the holder to stop the damp or anything getting at the powder, for powder when damp was worse than useless. The amount of blasting powder he judged to be necessary he pushed with the copper-wire rod to the dead-end of the hole two feet or a yard into the rock. Behind the powder he would ram clay tight until the hole he had bored was full to the mouth, with blasting powder right forward, and rammed clay behind it to the mouth. That done, he would with copper wire first make a hole through

the clay right forward to the powder. Then he would make what he called 'a squib' by screwing some fine powder into paper till it was like a spill. This he would insert into the little hole made by the copper wire.' Then before lighting that, he would tell little Joe to go back to stop any man or boy coming forward into the roadway. He would shout to the men working in the roads - mostly called 'stalls' - each side: 'Don't let anybody come down through the face until you hear this shot I'm firing go off.' Then he would light the 'squib' with his candle, and run for all he was worth back to where he had sent little Joe out of the way. And often before he had got to where Joe was standing out of the way the big bang would be heard, and lumps of rock would come crashing through the dark after Joe's dad. By the sound of the big bang Joe's father judged the result of the shot. 'That's a good shot,' he would say, or, 'That's a bad shot.' Too much blasting powder was as bad as too little, it had to be just right before it would do its work properly. Where the air was deficient in quantity, Joe and his dad had to wait sometimes half an hour for the powder smoke to clear, so as they could go forward into the roadway to see what sort of work the blasting powder had done for them. 'Come on, we can't wait any longer for the smoke to clear,' Joe's dad would say at last, and into the smoke, which made them cough like anything, they had to go. All day the smoke was hanging about in the bit of air there was, for when Joe's dad was not blasting rock, one of the other colliers in the same heading was.

It was after a shot, and in the thick smoke, that the man working the 'stall' above the 'stall' in which Joe worked with his dad, was buried under a fall of rock roof. He grew tired of waiting for the smoke to clear, for he had a living to get for himself, his wife, and seven children. So he went forward, and began with a long iron bar to prize down some rock the shot had loosened, and in the thick smoke his candle couldn't show him that right above where

he was standing using the bar, there were loosened stones very near as big as the rocking-stone down Pontypridd. Down they came on top of him. 'Quiet a minute,' said Joe's dad in the 'stall' below. 'Did you hear that, Joe?' 'I heard something,' said Joe. 'Next "stall" up - ' He shouted, Joe's father did: 'Hoy, Ike, all right up there?' No answer. 'Let's go an' see,' said Joe's dad, calling as he went. Joe following his dad, his dad who had sensed somehow what had befallen Ike Gruffydd in the road above, where he was working by himself without a butty. They saw one hand bleeding over the iron bar it was clutching, and his two legs from the knees down to his feet. The rest of him was under the fall of rock roof. 'Run to tell the men in the other places, Joe,' said Joe's dad as he began to lift stones from off Ike Gruffydd. Joe ran, soon to run back with other men and boys.

Ike Gruffydd was not quite dead when they got him, as he was, from under what had fallen on him. Though not yet middle-day all the men and boys dressed to go home with him. Half of a wooden ventilation door they laid him on to carry him underhanded back to the pit-bottom. On top of the pit they shouldered him on high, and Joe, being the smallest boy, they shouldered with him to act as a pillow, and to stop the bandaged bleeding head of the man Ike Gruffydd from rolling about. Joe, sitting on the homeward end of the doorpiece on which the man lay stretched, sat cross-legged with the man's bleeding head in his lap, acting as pillow and attendant. Joe had a ride, a long ride.

Sleet that was neither rain nor snow was falling, so Joe's father took off his outer blanket coat to put over Joe, who up on men's shoulders was more exposed than he was to the cold sleet. His 'blanket coat', as he called it, was a mole-skin coat lined with blanketing of draught-board design, and Joe was glad of it up there on the bearers' shoulders with the bleeding head of the dying man in his lap. A fleet-footed couple had been sent in advance, one to tell

the doctor, the other to tell the wife to get ready for what was coming to her.

Four men carrying on their shoulders through the cold sleet a man lying and a tiny child sitting. Every hundred yards a halt, when fresh bearers in fours from the head of the long procession relieved those who had borne the burden a hundred yards. 'Got him?' 'Yes, we've got him.' Keeping step like soldiers. The man whose head was in little Joe's lap snoring frothy blood to wet Joe's thighs like as if he had wet himself. Five times Joe's dad had 'carried' before the procession reached the house in Ynysfach, where all the neighbours were on their door-steps shaking their heads sadly and murmuring 'God help him, poor fellow bach.' The wife had distributed her seven children amongst the neighbours out of the way whilst she got the place ready to receive her man. The doctor was there with her to see if there was anything he could do. There wasn't, as it happened.

When Joe's dad caught him under the armpits to stand him on his feet once more, Joe couldn't stand, for by sitting cross-legged with the man's head in his lap Joe's legs had gone dead, so it was some time before he could stand on his legs to walk home with his dad and some other men who happened to be going the same way. The men talked about the need for a hospital, but not earnestly, more for something to say. Anyway, if there was a hospital in the place it would have been no help to Ike Gruffydd as it happened, for it was the day of his funeral and coming out early to attend it was what the men were talking about when they separated, some to turn in for a pint on strap, others to go on home. Joe could hardly touch the food that Megan hurriedly put for him that day for thinking of the man's head in his lap all time.

But next day he was all right again, and down the pit there was not much talk about Ike Gruffydd, now laid out tidy in the little house in Ynysfach, where the houses are Company houses. Another man working in Ike Gruffydd's

'stall' to-day, and 'working a "stall"' underground left a man with little time in which to grieve over the men injured and killed daily. Joe's dad could, so Joe thought, work a 'stall' better than any man in any pit anywhere. The way he used to work the coal forward, holing with his holing-mandrel the face-slips to make the 'slips' of coal give, to make them fall. You had to 'hole' under the coal of the stalls on the face-side of the heading, but on the other side, which was called 'the back-side', you cleaned what was called the 'brug' in Welsh, which in English no doubt meant the 'brow' of the backward-sloping slips of coal. The slips like layers of coal varied in thickness, and they were easier to work when thin – say a foot thick – than when they were thick, say a yard thick. After loosening coal and loading it into trams, the empty space left had to be timbered to hold the roof up, and also filled with the rock blasted to make a roadway of six feet high to enable the tram to follow the coal forward. All sorts of jobs Joe's dad could do, and all of them well, and Joe was now learning to do many of the jobs that required doing. Sometimes – and it used to frighten Joe at first, but not now – when his father was 'holing butts' or 'cleaning brugs' to loosen the coal, the coal would 'pounce' angrily. A 'pounce' is a muffled little explosion which the coal makes in its anger when men all over the pit are worrying it and disturbing its rest. First, as it was being disturbed, it would start making complaints like firework crackers which grew, louder and louder until they would culminate in a 'pounce', which was its surrender to the man attacking it so cunningly and ruthlessly. The slip of coal would groan as it cracked to fall on the rock bottom. In the dust it made falling Joe's father would roll over on his back and chuckle triumphantly. 'There it is, Joe bach. Now to fill it into the tram – but reach me my tea-jack first.' Steaming with sweat he would gargle his throat to remove the thickest of the coal-dust before drinking deep. 'Now a chew, an' then we'll start filling.' Out with his brass tobacco-box

from his trousers' pocket. Loose tobacco, about half a pipeful, into his mouth, before he started handling the hugest lumps of coal in a way that never failed to amaze Joe. Oh, the crossbar lump with which he made secure the 'door-end' of the walled-up tram of coal, the end which was opened at the pit-head as the tram after it was weighed went forward to be tipped into railway trucks. Yes, my dad knows how to fill a tram of coal, Joe thought. Nearly thirty hundredweight he could build like a house founded on rock into each tram. At the end of the long day's work Joe's dad, soaking wet with sweat, would say: 'That's enough, gather 'em up, Joe bach.'

Then Joe would gather up all his dad's tools to put them all tidy back behind the tram, where there was no danger of any rock falling from the roof to break them. 'Must find a safe place for the tools, Joe bach.' Mustn't leave no tools lying about where they might be broken. See if they're all there now, make sure that they're all there. Let's see now, Joe would say to himself. There's the

two cutting mandrels,

two holing mandrels,

two bottom mandrels,

that's all the mandrels which some of the English boys called 'picks'. Then the

two coal-boxes,

which Joe's dad called 'curling-boxes', which were boxes in which coal was loaded on in the coal-face to be carried – in thick seams – and dragged – in thin seams – along the rock bottom back to where the tram stood in the six-feet-high roadway, and there emptied into the tram. Yes, there are the coal-boxes with handles each side, like a sharp slice in front, riveted back behind. Where's the shovels? Here they are.

Three shovels,

Two sledges, one heavy, one light,

Four wedges, two coal wedges, two rock wedges,

Six chisels for boring rock,

Churn for boring coal, also
Drills, handle and bar for boring coal,
One hatchet for cutting and shaping timber,
One long iron bar for prizing,
One clamp wedge,
One pair of clamps,
One measuring rod,
One bucket

for filling away water which in wet places accumulated till it was a pool in the roadway. This water Joe's father emptied several buckets of into each loaded tram of coal to make the small coal weigh heavier on the pit-head machine, and stick together to go down over the screen as large coal, and not down through into the small-coal truck where he would get no pay for it. Then there were other things such as

chalk

for marking the loaded trams with 'our number', as Joe said. Cramps and nails for fastening the rails over which the trams travelled in the six-feet-high roadway – and a boy had to be very careful when marking his dad's number on the loaded trams which had to travel through sludge and water back to the pit-bottom. If 'our mark' was not plain for the man in the weighing-machine to see when our loaded trams reached the world on top of the pit, how was the man in the weighing-machine to be sure that it was our tram? 'So mark the trams plain with chalk, Joe bach.' 'Yes, dad.'

Every night some of the mandrels, chisels, wedges, had to be taken out and up the pit for the blacksmith on top of the pit to sharpen, and 'temper' right to meet coal and rock. And every now and then Joe's dad carried his hatchet out and up the pit to hold it on the grindstone whilst Joe turned the handle. But not often, for Joe's dad kept a good oilstone underground, and whenever he had a minute to spare he would be rubbing his hatchet with the oilstone. So there were a lot of tools to look after, and

many things for little Joe to remember. He got better as time went on, and when he did do anything the wrong way his dad didn't shout at him now like he used to shout at Joe's brothers when they were working butties with him.

Henry Richard's lecture at the Crosby Hall in the city of London was far from being forgotten in Wales, and then his most remarkable series of articles on the 'Social and Political Condition of Wales' made people all over Wales start buying the London *Morning Star* as well as the London *Evening Star*, for Henry Richard's articles were appearing in both the morning and evening *Star*. The three thousand Nonconformist chapels of Wales at their denominational assemblies expressed their great appreciation of the articles in the form of resolutions. It was good, they said, to have a man like Henry Richard living up there in London, from where in these articles he was presenting Wales fairly to the world at last, and defending Wales against the attacks of ignorant and prejudiced persons of other nations.

But resolutions of appreciation and votes of thanks were not enough, said the firebrands attending the Annual Meeting of the Glamorganshire Association of Independent Churches at Maesteg in the Llynfi Valley. Meetings over the week-end, at every session of which the Rev. Watcyn Jones, of Beulah Chapel, Merthyr Tydfil, kept on saying: 'I, for one, am not prepared to let it go at that,' by 'that', meaning the Resolution which was to be submitted, and which read as follows: 'That the warmest thanks of this Association be presented to Mr. Henry Richard for his able and -'

The young minister whom his friends called 'Wat' grunted loudly as he turned his back on the platform to loudly express his disgust to the minority of about a half-dozen of the younger ministers present who shared it. At the close of the last session the Rev. Watcyn Jones led the disgusted minority out of the chapel in which the Association had been holding its meetings, and down the street to the

Coffee Tavern on the right for a cup of tea before going to the railway station to catch their train. Their tea was left to go cold as they talked a mile a minute.

'Humph, nothing to do with politics – for that, in effect, was what those on the platform said, wasn't it? Nonsense.' The Rev. Watcyn Jones wriggled about in his chair as though he were trying to wriggle his impatience and disgust from his head down and out through his elastic-sided boots. 'And John Davies of Cardiff knows that it's nonsense. Of course, it's nonsense.' He raised his voice to oratorical level to declaim, 'It's high time the Nonconformists of Wales had a voice at Westminster. Isn't Nonconformity the backbone of Wales?'

The other ministers nodded heads.

'Here we are, with about three thousand chapels in Wales,' continued the Rev. Watcyn Jones, 'yet we've nobody to stand up for them – or for their congregations – in Parliament. No, what we've got representing – no, misrepresenting us – in Parliament, are the squires and landowners, the ironmasters and coalowners, who've brutalised our people and – Pshaw. Nothing to do with politics, indeed.'

'Remember, Wat,' said a Rhondda minister ironically, 'the ironmasters are building Company schools for the children now.'

'Yes, for poundage money stopped at the office out of their fathers' wages. But before the ironmasters ever as much as thought of spending a little of their profits on schools, our Sunday-schools were for a half-century and more the only place where our people's children could get a bit of schooling. We, in our Sunday-schools, maintained the only cultural agency to save our people from where these English ironmasters and coalowners were driving them. To hell,' he shouted, 'that's where they were driving our people. No politics, indeed. My father was a Chartist – and he wasn't a moral "suasionist", either. There's a lot of my father in me, friends. I can't forget, no I can't

forget. And there we are in Merthyr with a Member of Parliament who is against vote by ballot. No wonder.'

'All the masters are against it,' said a Pontypridd minister, 'for the ironmasters and coalowners are all of them becoming great landed gentry now — so they don't want vote by ballot. They're buying up big estates far away from here where they made all their money, estates carrying Church of England livings —'

'Yes, look at Crawshay Bailey,' said a Treforest minister.

'Yes, but we know all that,' said the Rev. Watcyn Jones. 'But what are we as chapels going to do about it? that's the question. We as chapels could stop their gallop if only we'd drop this nonsense about the chapels keeping clear of politics. If I had my way I'd send a deputation from our Association to invite Henry Richard to stand as Liberal at the next election against that man we've got in Merthyr.'

'No use,' said a Dowlais minister, 'we'd never be able to shift Bruce. For he went in unopposed when Sir John Guest died years ago, and he's been there unopposed since.'

'Yes,' said the Rev. Watcyn Jones, 'but if only we could get a man like Henry Richard to stand. . . .'

CHAPTER VI

MADCAP MORIAH

'WHAT's the matter then?' said little Joe, when he and his brother Will were sent out of the house as soon as they had walked in from work behind their father. As they were putting their food-boxes and tea-jacks on the window-ledge, Megan whispered something to the father, who said: 'Don't say.' 'Yes,' said Megan, who next said: 'Go out to play for a minute, there's good boys. I want to talk to dad a minute.' 'I want my taters an' meat,' said Will. 'Yes, you shall have it, for it's all ready, but in a minute after I talk to dad. Go now for a minute, good boys,' she said, pushing them out and shutting the door after them. 'What's the matter then, our Will?' said little Joe. 'I heard what she said to dad,' said Will, kicking a stone. 'What did she say?' 'Said that the Cheap Jack have run away with our Moriah.' 'Run away? How run away, our Will?' 'Well, gone with him to wherever his show is.' 'To be in the show with him, is it?' 'No, to be in the house with him I expect, same as - but we'll know 'fore long.' He knocked on the closed door. 'I want my taters an' meat, our Megan.' 'In a minute, good boy.' 'I'm nearly starving.' 'Then come on in,' said his father. He opened the door and walked in, Joe following.

In a way Will was right, though perhaps he was not quite correct, in assuming from Megan's whispered words to his father that the Cheap Jack had run away with Moriah, for it was a case of six o' one and half-dozen o'

the other, with the benefit of whatever doubt there was on the Cheap Jack's side. The fact of the matter was that he had grown tired of having his honourable repeated offers of marriage rejected by Megan; and Moriah had grown even more tired of going alone to the brickyard every morning to work hard.

For the best part of two years now the Cheap Jack had been wanting Megan to marry him. Wherever his place of business happened to be, Pontypridd, the Rhondda – no matter where it was, he'd be driving his prize pony into Merthyr about midnight on Saturday. In the Castle Hotel he stayed like a gentleman week-end after week-end, wearing now an expensive wig of real hair to cover his baldness. Didn't always wear a bowler-hat now. He had paid a lot of money for that wig of real hair to cover his head's nakedness, but it didn't seem as if Megan liked him any the better for it. Moriah did, but it wasn't Moriah he wanted to like him better. Didn't particularly want her to like him any. It was Megan he wanted, and it was Megan that was driving him almost mad with her –

'Your mother, always your mother,' he one night cried as walking between the two girls along the road back from Pontsarn. And that was another thing. Megan wouldn't go a step with him unless Moriah was with them. This night he jerked his thumb in Moriah's direction and said: 'Can't she stay home from the brickyard to look after your mother? I'm willing to marry you tidy an' make a lady of you.'

'Easy to see that I'm not wanted,' said Moriah.

'Quite right, you're not,' said Shon.

'Who said she's not wanted?' said Megan.

'She said it first same as she have many times before. You keep your mouth shut, Moriah, there's a good gel. Mind your own business, that's enough for you to do. Megan, if you marry me, you shall have everything you want. If you like you shall go to night-school to learn to read, you shall go to somebody to learn to sing with music,

and a ride with me in the trap every day. I can't say fairer than that. Can I, Moriah?"

'I'm minding my own business,' said Moriah, frumping her face.

'An' I'm minding my mother for as long as she's spared to us,' said Megan.

'Ay, and she may live to be as old as that old bopa Lloyd you talks about,' said Shon.

'I hope to God she will,' said Megan sincerely.

No doubt that helped to kill Shon's pig, for old bopa Lloyd was anything from ninety to a hundred, and the thought of his having to wait until Megan's mother died somewhere around that age was enough to drive any man to do he didn't know what altogether. What he did do was to look more often in Moriah's direction, and when he looked in her direction he always found she was looking in his with a 'Won't I do?' smile on her face. Well, she was quite as good-looking as Megan any day. Riper, of the two. Fuller above the waist like. Dark she was, and her eyes on the gleam always, on the look-out, you might say. Megan she often stared at the something there is in nothing, but not Moriah. Yes, Moriah was young and healthy and livelier than her twin-sister a lot. So Shon began looking her way more when on the three's company walks and drives, which was Megan's arrangement after chapel only on Sundays, and when her father was home to look to her mother.

It's hard to explain how it started. Anyway, before long Shon was driving over from wherever he was a night now and then middle of the week, when it was Moriah met him all smiles outside the Castle Hotel after he had seen to his pony and had a drink. And Moriah never wearied him by talking about her mother bad in bed. Then came the night when she said 'yes' not to an offer of marriage, but to a proposal that she should live with him for a while to see how they got on. The note was pushed under the door in the morning when Megan was upstairs tending on

her mother after her father and the boys had left for work, the boys without knowing that their sister Moriah had not been home all night. Letter by letter Megan had worked on the note which had been written by Shon, and in the end she had to stop her brother Llewelyn's two children on their way home from school to read it for her. The first read it half-way before being stopped by Megan. 'There's a good gel — here's a ha'penny for you.' Then to the boy: 'Now let bopa Megan see how you can read.' The boy read the other half, neither of the two children thinking it anything more than some bit of old writing their bopa Megan was testing their reading ability with. They both forgot it soon, as Megan knew they would, but she didn't forget it then or ever. 'Grand you can read,' she said to the boy who had read the last half of the note, 'and here's a ha'penny for you too. Off home to dinner now.'

For long after they had gone she sat with the note in her hand, now with every word bitterly memorised. She only wanted to hear something once. A new hymn in chapel, a new chorus the choir was to sing, a new song — once was enough. She could sing it then. But she couldn't sing this on the note, for it had gone too far in, sunk too deep to be given out again. She could only keep it whether she wanted to or not. 'For shame, Shon. For shame, Moriah.' Shamed them, and her mother like she was. But it was not so much the shame of it made her cry after she had turned the key in the lock of the door so as none of the neighbours could burst in as they often did to ask: 'How's your poor mother to-day? God help her.' There was something that went deeper than shame even.

After a long time she sighed as she put the note she was holding away inside her bodice, and rose to unlock the door she had locked against intrusion. The neighbours could come now.

Tending her mother, getting the taters an' meat ready for her father and the two boys. The time passed somehow, and now they were home from the pit. After they

had washed all over she went upstairs with her father to sit with her mother, leaving the two boys downstairs. The woman, her mother that was, now her baby, looked only at her husband with a sort of unintelligent satisfaction in her eyes. She seemed to be faintly aware that he was there smiling down on her.

'Where have they run to?' Rhys said quietly.

'To where he's selling in Aberdare, the note did say.'

'To be married is it, Megan?'

'The note don't say anything about getting married, but I'll know before another night's over my head. I'm going over to Aberdare first thing in the morning; you must stay home from work to look to mam for me to go.'

'With the train will you go?'

'No, I'll walk the mountain. Safer on the road than going through that Aberdare tunnel in the train.' She pulled the note out of her bodice to point to three words on it. 'Look after mam,' were the words.

Only Will left home for work next morning; he, and Megan in her bit o' best, walked together as far as the Cyfarthfa Works limekiln, where he turned left for the pit, leaving her to go straight on up the mountain road. Peny-rheolgerrig, which in the English tongue signifies 'Top of the stone road', she soon reached, and after that it was only mountain road made by mules, horses and people like herself walking the mountain over into Aberdare, or from Aberdare over the mountain into Merthyr, as thousands who were so afraid of the old train did.

Nice it was on top of the mountain in the early morning, she began to feel, stopping to cetch her breath right on the top. First time for her to be top o' this mountain, from where it was downhill to Merthyr, Aberdare, an' everywhere. She could see such a lot from there, see where she and Moriah had been picking blackberries that time over the mouth of the Aberdare tunnel, into which they had seen a train disappearing like winky, and another they saw coming out like winky from the tunnel before they had

picked their baskets full. No more picking blackberries she an' Moriah any more, she thought, beginning to feel heavy again around the heart. Moriah was gone, down there somewhere.

'Come on, step it out,' the birds with nothing to trouble them sang at her as she turned her face towards Aberdare, which she was in the main street of before any of the shops were open, but all the public-houses were open. In a field below the railway embankment near the railway station, she found the Cheap Jack's place all shut up fast, and when she knocked on the door of one of the vans, the one Shon used to live in part of before he started staying in the Castle Hotel, one of the men selling an' singing for him opened the door to ask her what she wanted. 'Oh, I remember you now,' the man said after she had told him where she had come from. 'But the boss is staying at the hotel on the Square.' After the man had told her how to get to the hotel, she went there and asked for Mr. Shon Howell, please. The place was full of men drinking so early in the morning, but the landlady found time to talk. 'Walking you've been?' she said, after she had sent a gel up to tell Mr. Shon Howell and his wife that there was somebody from Merthyr wanting to see him. 'Yes, walking,' said Megan, thinking over the landlady saying 'Mr. Shon Howell and his wife.' 'Can you drink a cup o' tea?' said the landlady. 'No - thank you for asking.' 'You're welcome.' 'I know.' Then the landlady had to go and serve, and the gel came downstairs to say: 'They're coming now - why don't you sit down?' 'I can stand.' 'As you like,' said the gel, going somewhere.

Megan waited in the bit of hallway near the foot of the stairs, down which Shon presently came hurriedly dressed, his eyes half full of sleep. 'Er - hullo, Megan.' 'Where's Moriah with you?' she asked colder than any snowball. 'She'll be down now.' 'She'd better - Don't hold your dirty hand out to me. You an' your wig an' fine talk. Ashamed to look people in the face you ought

to be. A slip of a gel, an' you old enough to be her father.'

'She's nineteen, an' old enough to know what she's doing. I'm only thirty -'

'I've brought your old watch an' chain,' she said, drawing it up packed in paper from inside her bodice. 'You can give this to her again.' She threw it at him.

He picked it up off the floor as two men passed through to the bar. 'Now look here, Megan - but come into the private room a minute. We don't -'

'I'm not moving from by here. Not on me the shame is.'

He shrugged his shoulders as Moriah, dressed, but with, her hair still in a plaited rope down to below her waist, came down the stairs, sliding the hand with the ring on the finger down the polished stair-rail. Tight-lipped Megan watched her coming. 'So he bought you a ring to show people, Moriah.'

'Now, Megan,' Shon was saying when she turned quick to hit him straight in the face hard, hard enough to displace the wig which he had put on so hurriedly. But if she did. Moriah swung her round like if she was a baby. 'You'd better be careful who you're hitting, our Megan. Try that again, an' you'll get something you won't like off me. Yes, an' quick too.'

Megan had gone limp now, an' she was hanging her head. 'Oh, all right, let me go, let me go -'

'Not before we've understood each other,' said Shon. 'Come on in this room out o' the way a minute.'

'No, I'm going back home to dad, the boys, an' mam there in the bed -'

'How is she?' said Moriah.

'A lot you care,' she said, to make Moriah cry quietly into her hand.

'You're not going till you've had some breakfast with us,' said Shon, masterfully now. 'Go on in there the pair of you, an' I'll get the landlady to give us breakfast in there

out o' the way.' He pushed them into the private room before going to speak to the landlady, and when he went into the private room after speaking to the landlady he found the two sisters mixing tears in each other's arms. He stood scratching his head looking at 'em for a bit, hardly knowing what to make of 'em. 'There, there,' Megan was saying, patting Moriah's back, an' Moriah saying 'There, there,' an' patting Megan's back. So what could he say but 'There, there, don't cry any more, there's good gels, for the gel is coming to put breakfast for us now in by here. Before she comes, let me tell you one thing, Megan. Me an' Moriah will be married tidy before the week is out — that's if it can be done in the time. Do you believe me?'

'I don't disbelieve you,' she said, wiping her eyes. 'Let me pin your hair up, Moriah.'

'My hairpins are in the room upstairs — come on up a minute.' 'No, you fetch 'em.' After she had gone to fetch her hairpins Megan said to Shon: 'It's done now, Shon, an' you've said you'll marry her. Well an' good, p'raps. Anyway, I'll be able to face the neighbours. No good a lot of old talk now. We must do the best we can, that's all.'

'How do you mean?' Shon said, wishing last night had been only a dream.

'Here they are,' said Moriah, as she came with the hairpins. Megan pinned her sister's hair up whilst the gel of the place was putting breakfast on the table. They all ate a good breakfast, after which Shon ordered his pony an' trap to be brought round for him to drive Megan as far as the top of the mountain if no further. 'No,' she said, 'I'll walk.' 'You won't,' said he. 'Certainly not,' said Moriah. 'Oh, all right,' said Megan. It was she sat behind this time, Moriah with Shon in front. A stiff pull with three up it was for the pony up through Abernant to the top of the mountain, where Shon let the pony out of the shafts for a bit to rest and nibble a bit. He walked after the pony off the road a piece, leaving the two sisters

with their arms about each other and their faces towards Merthyr. 'Crying again,' he muttered, looking at 'em from where he was keeping an eye on the pony. Funny how women cried an' cried all the time he was thinking, when Moriah called out to say that Megan was going now then.

Leading the pony off the rough grass towards them he said, 'If you like I'll drive you right down into Merthyr.' 'No,' she said. 'But you'll do what you said an' get married, won't you?'

'Yes, he will, don't you fear,' Moriah said confidently, before Shon had a chance to reply.

'Then good-bye now – an' good luck after starting wrong I wish you from my heart.' She took Moriah to hold her fast in her arms for a minute, then she loosed her and turned to run down the mountain road to the Top of the stone road, which in our language is Penyrheolgerrig. Moriah and Shon looking after her. When they couldn't see her any more Shon put the pony back in the shafts of the trap like if he didn't care about what he was doing, and Moriah she stood all the time looking down towards Merthyr.

'When you're ready then,' sighed Shon, after he had turned the pony's head towards Aberdare, where Shon had to conduct a sale that evening again. To look at him standing there by the pony's head anyone who didn't know different would think that it was a funeral or something he had been to, or a gwyl nos instead of an unofficial first night of the honeymoon with a lovely gel with a ring on her finger but no marriage lines to keep safe. A 'gwyl nos' is our Welsh name for the sort of vigil, service and feast which we Welsh people keep with our dead the night before burial, and Shon he looked as though the night before had been a 'gwyl nos' for him. 'When you're ready then,' he sighed again.

Moriah turned and came towards him trying to smile a bit. 'She's gone then,' she said. 'Ay,' said Shon. 'Jump

up – an' try not to cry any more, good gel.' But cry quietly she did all the way back to Aberdare; an' cry Megan did too best part of the way back down into Merthyr.

When the haulier came with his horse to take the loaded tram away from Rhys Davies's working-place in the pit he was more excited than usual. 'They're saying back on the double parting that Gethin Pit have blowed up again, an' it sure to be true too, for the chap who rides the journey had it from the blacksmith who came down from top o' the pit to splice the rope of the four-feet seam.'

'Gethin?' said Rhys Davies.

'Gethin?' said little Joe.

'Get dressed quick, boy,' said Joe's father. 'Never mind gathering the tools, get dressed – I'll leave you to turn my empty tram out of the way,' he cried to the haulier as going with his coat an' box an' jack in his hand out of the roadway, Joe following him only half dressed. Joe remembered Owen his brother blown up when Gethin Pit had blown up before, and now his brother Sam, who was married to Mike Murphy's daughter an' living amongst the Irish in Company Row, was working in Gethin Pit, an' p'raps he too was blown up this time. All the time pits were blowing up and men being blowed up with 'em, but I hope our Sam is not blowed up same as our Owen was – I wish dad wouldn't go so fast.

When they got to the top of the pit they heard that some of the bodies had been got up from Gethin Pit and that they were being loaded into coal-trucks to be taken by the engine to town. So Joe and his father hurried towards where they thought the trucks would be stopped to unload the bodies there where the Cyfarthfa works and pits' line crosses the hard road near the Dynevor Arms in George-town, but before they got there they saw a big crowd of people standing on the tip this side of Ynysfach works, which was a sort of feeder works for the ever so much bigger Cyfarthfa works, which the Ynysfach works made pig-iron

for, some said. ‘What are they all standing there for, I wonder?’ Joe’s father said. They climbed the tip to inquire, and then they learnt that the trucks with the bodies had not yet passed on the way to unload near the Dynevor Arms in Georgetown. ‘Then p’raps we’d better stay here for a bit,’ said the father to Joe, an’ they both hoping that Sam was not blown up with the others same as their Owen had been with the other forty-six when Gethin Pit blew up that time before.

There were hundreds an’ hundreds standing on the high tip waiting to see the train of the dead go by along the line below, an’ more people coming from the town all time. ‘We’ll stay here until we see the engine with the trucks coming round the bend,’ said Joe’s father, ‘then we’ll run as far as the Dynevor Arms to see if your brother Sam’s amongst ’em. I hope to God he’s not.’ That’s what hundreds an’ hundreds of people were hoping, hoping that their Sams an’ Shons an’ Dicks an’ Toms an’ Harrys were not amongst those killed. Scores of women nursing babies in shawls on the tip, on the high place. Joe grew tired of standing, lost interest in the rumours flying about, so he sat down where he was with his father in the front of the excited crowd. Over his head now the excited buzz of conversation. On the canal bridge near the Corner House public-house, people stood pointing to the crowd on the tip of which Joe and his father were an anxious couple.

Joe looked down and out at the town, which had never looked as it did now to him. Everything so clear-cut. Town, river, canal and railway lines. On the canal, the man-made waterway from Merthyr to Cardiff, Joe could see three loaded barges, two loaded with iron rails, one with small-coal, the one with small-coal in it was being lowered down into the lock to get to the next low-level of its journey to Cardiff. Boys about his own age he could see leading the horses, who walked the canal-bank pulling the canal-barges. A woman standing with a baby in her arms behind and above Joe began to whimper.

That canal goes down to the sea where the big ships are, Joe was thinking. So does the railway, and the River Taff too. Beyond the canal a hundred yards or so he could see the River Taff like a black, poisoned snake flowing painfully. He had seen the same river flowing clean and musically not so far away at Pontsarn, where it was clean for boys to swim in, and for fish to live in. But from where the Cyfarthfa works began to insult the proud clean river, it went poisoned for twenty-five miles down to the sea. Its tributaries from every valley came bearing filth to insult it with. Morlais Brook came with the filth from Dowlais works into it, and every stream from every valley was polluted on its way to lose itself and its filth in the insulted river. At Pontypridd, the greatest of its tributaries rushed black and poisonous out of the Rhondda valley to empty itself into the proud River Taff. 'Take that, proud Taff, with you to the sea,' the tributaries one after the other said to the insulted river. People living along its banks also insulted it now that it was no longer navigable. Thousands daily threw filth into the face of the proud river, did what they didn't dare do to the canal. Old beds and mattresses alive with vermin they slung at it. 'Take that with you to the sea.' Unwanted cats and dogs with stones heavy around their necks they threw at it. 'Take those down to the sea with you.' A flowing cesspool for twenty-five miles from Merthyr to the sea at Cardiff.

Joe had never heard of a fish being caught in the River Taff once the Cyfarthfa works and the Morlais Brook bearing Dowlais works filth, had poisoned it, but he had seen boys catching the fish called gudgeons in the canal. Of course the canal was different, that had to be kept clean and navigable after such a lot of money had been spent to dig it and put water in it after. People were threatened with the police-court if they threw anything into the canal. All the same they did, some of them, throw things into the canal too, but not near as much as was thrown into the River Taff. Still, Joe liked the bridges over the River

Taff better than the bridges over the canal, which were not in his opinion worth calling bridges.

The woman with the baby in her arms standing above and behind him was still whimpering now and then. Was her husband one o' them blown up this time? he wondered for a bit before he fixed his eyes on the big roundabouts and shows situated on the waste ground between the canal and the River Taff. Will had taken him to see all the shows there the Saturday night before, and they had two rides apiece on the wooden horses that had saddles and bridles to hold. Spent all their few coppers pocket-money before coming away, for they went into a peeping-show and had one ride on the swings, then it was 'wedi popi', as Will said –

'Here it comes,' cried someone, and everybody who was talking shut up as an engine with several trucks behind it, came slowly like a dead march on rails around the bend of the line. Joe stood up, and he felt his dad's hand tighten on his shoulder as the train of the dead came nearer. The engine had shut off steam now that it was going downhill, and the driver he stood with his hand on some lever like a soldier with his hand on his arms reversed when the officer of the Merthyr Volunteers had a military funeral. The crowd on the tip high above the railway line could look down right into the trucks as they slowly passed, and they saw the shapes of bodies under brattice-cloth used for making brattice-cloth doors to turn the air underground. 'Oh, my God,' cried the woman with the baby as the last truck passed below. Then the crowd broke, and all that could ran after the train to where it was to be unloaded.

Sighing and a-sobbing – Sam's Irish wife crying. 'You go on home, Joe,' said his father, 'I'll go up as far as Company Row to tell Sam's wife.' For the first time in his life Rhys Davies that day exchanged words with an Irishman, he even shook hands with one. For hearing his married daughter crying murder, Mike Murphy ran in from where he was living next door to see what was the matter. Bridget

his wife followed him, and when they heard from her what had happened they tried to comfort her. 'But are you sure?' said her mother, 'that your Sam is gone,' and all Eileen could do was point to Rhys and cry: 'There's his da' that's seen him dead. O holy mother o' God . . .'

Big Mike Murphy held out his hand, Rhys Davies shook it.

The Irish of Company Row held a wake over what was left of Sam, and Mike invited Rhys to the wake, but Rhys would not go. There was a limit to his tolerance. However, he walked in the funeral of the thirty with Mike at his side. Behind him and Mike walked Sam's two married brothers, Llewelyn and Elias, and behind them walked Will with young Tim Murphy, nearly as big a man as his father. Joe didn't walk in the funeral of the thirty, but he stood side the road to watch the procession and listen to the singing, which was continuous from the time the thirty were hearsed until they were earthed in the Cefn cemetery. Then Joe went home to look to his mam for a bit whilst Megan went to sit for a bit with Sophie Morris, whose only child was one of the thirty on the way to the Cefn to be earthed. Illegitimate he was, but he was all Sophie had, an' she thought the world of him, an' he was a good boy to his mother. Going to his work every day in the Gethin Pit, and on pay Saturdays handing over every penny of his wages to Sophie, an' they were getting on famous together in the little house side o' the Tramroad, and now . . .

'Look you to mam a bit, Joe,' said Megan, 'for I'm going down the Tramroad to sit with Sophie Morris for a bit.' A couple of gels home injured from the brickyard, one with her hand and the other with her breast bad after a brick hit it, were there sitting with Sophie when Megan arrived. Nobody said much. Just sat around.

Her boy was one of the thirty on the way to the Cefn. Megan started to tell her about the wreath of artificial flowers that Moriah and Shon had sent with love for Sam from some place in England where the Cheap Jack was

now doing business. ‘A wire frame an’ all to put over it on the grave. . . .’ But Sophie wasn’t listening.

Singing all the way to the Cefn, always more an’ better singing at the funerals of those killed than at the funerals of those who had died in their beds. ‘This singing’s melting me bones,’ Mike Murphy whispered to Rhys Davies, at whose side he was walking in the procession. Such singing was enough to melt anyone’s bones, let alone an alien’s. It melted those who lined the streets, stood in doorways, hung out of windows, stood behind windows – melted all within sound of it. Melted the bones of the ironmaster and coalowner in his castle with three hundred and sixty-five windows, melted the bones of those living in cellar dwellings near by.

Long and black-garbed procession, straggly, no ordered progress towards the cemetery. Well, the thirty going there were in no hurry – neither were those taking them there. The Requiem for their dead was what they appeared most concerned about. It came, mighty and mournful, and charged with feeling from thousands of hearts. Few of them could read, and fewer still could write, but they could sing as naturally, if not as cheerfully, as the birds in the trees. When one hymn ended, a tenor at the head of the procession would turn about, and with a voice like the sound of a trumpet of silver he would send back along the length of the procession, and up out of the vale to the hilltops, the first line of the next hymn, which was taken up by the thousands waiting for his lead.

Only the Saviour, they sang, could be relied upon, and as they sang they turned the eyes of their coal-scarred faces skywards. No conductor could have achieved, or, if you like, produced by training and discipline the mighty majestic melody which for their dead was flowing – ‘Who died on the cross,’ they sang, their eyes now lifted to the hills as though seeing Him one of three crucified.

Here and there in the procession ministers of religion, grave, full-whiskered or side-whiskered men these. Sad-

eyed, not singing all of them. A few of them would have to officiate at the gravesides, where they will pray and preach feelingly. Some of them famous for their preaching. Great in their pulpits, greater in their lives lived. The hymn being sung nearly ended, and again the tenor turns about in readiness to . . .

Things were certainly looking bad for Mr. Bruce, who for sixteen years had represented Merthyr in Parliament. Now he looked like being defeated by a man the chapels were solid behind. Our place had prospered and grown until it had to be made a double-barrelled constituency, and the Liberals, who were nearly all chapel people, remembered the Henry Richard who had, a couple of years previous, sprang like a lion to defend Wales against the attacks of ignorant and prejudiced persons. Then, in the closing paragraph of the last of his articles to appear in the London *Star* morning and evening editions, he made what he called 'an earnest appeal to my countrymen manfully to assert their political rights, even though, as was possible and probable, they might have to suffer for their boldness.'

The appeal which he then made had since been read at all sorts of meetings in Merthyr and district, and often by the Rev. Watcyn Jones, of Beulah Chapel, which was in Castle Street on the Glebeland. This little chapel, said the opposition, was now nothing more than a committee-room for this Henry Richard that had been put up by the chapels against 'our Mr. Bruce', as they called the gentleman whom they said 'had served Merthyr well for sixteen years', and like Anthony over the body of Caesar they spoke of all that Mr. Bruce had done for Merthyr.

In Beulah Chapel, the Rev. Watcyn Jones was saying different, more than saying, roaring until he could be heard in the Castle Hotel to the right of the chapel a hundred yards, and as far left as the Iron Bridge. Then he could be heard by those in the two blacksmiths' shops in Post Office Lane, where the blacksmiths are busy every week-

day until dark shoeing horses. Yes, above the hammering of horses' shoes into shape, and the blowing of the bellows, the Rev. Watcyn Jones could be heard shouting out loud in Beulah Chapel. More like an election meeting than a mid-week chapel service, it was. 'No, I'm not ashamed to own myself the son of one of the old Cefn Chartists — and he was not of the moral 'suasion section, friends. Oh, no. Too much of that "moral 'suasion" nonsense in our chapels to-day. I'm not afraid to go out into the open to fight for our candidate, Henry Richard. Why should I be? The big people who meet up there in the Castle Hotel — and it isn't so long ago, my friends — most of you here can remember it, can remember when these same people who are now against Henry Richard sent for Scotch soldiers to shoot us Welsh people down. Now they want your votes for Mr. Bruce — after hanging Dic Penderyn, my friends, yes, and they'd like to hang me too, ay, and wouldn't they like to hang Henry Richard that we're going to send to Parliament to fight for us as Welsh people.

'Some of the ministers are afraid to come out into the open to fight for Henry Richard — and don't we know why? Of course we do. Got sons and relations bosses in the works and the pits, and they're afraid that if they show their colours their sons and relations will lose their jobs. They think more of their sons and relations than of their country. I'm proud to think that at last we've got a Welshman like Henry Richard to fight for. I may have to suffer for working as I have to get Henry Richard to stand, but I shall risk all that. Listen to this.' He pulled out from his pocket a tattered copy of the London *Evening Star* and proceeded to read from it after he had put reading-glasses on. 'This is what Henry Richard wrote two years ago.' He cleared his throat: 'And I have a word or two to say to my countrymen, the people, and especially the Nonconformists of Wales. If, after all, the system of terrorism and coercion is the one that shall be adopted towards them, why then they must gird their loins for the struggle. It is not

possible that they should remain passive and neutral amidst the conflict of great principles, in the issue of which they and their children are so vitally interested. They may have to suffer, and if so – I say it not lightly, but very solemnly – they must be prepared to suffer. It may be as much their duty to suffer for political as it was their fathers' duty to suffer for religious freedom. And it cannot last long, nor can the result be doubtful. If they only combine in this matter as earnestly as they have done in other matters, the force opposed to them, if so we must regard it, will prove far less formidable than it seems. Trech gwlad nag arglwydd.'

The Rev. Watcyn Jones held aloft the copy of the paper from which he had been reading Henry Richard's words. 'That's Henry Richard for you, friends, that's the sort of candidate we've got at last. . . .'

He said a lot more before the meeting closed. All present that night left the meeting pledged to do their utmost, irrespective of the consequences, to secure the return to Parliament of Henry Richard. In other chapels the same pledge was asked for and given, and from that night the election campaign became almost a religious revival on the one side, the Liberal side.

At the Castle Hotel and the Bush Hotel, which were the only two hotels patronised by those who were called 'the big people', there was head-shaking, and at an emergency meeting held at the Bush Hotel with a brewer in the chair, an emergency campaign was mapped out. The brewer in the chair assured those present that they could rely on the brewers making free beer flow, but beer, they feared, was not enough this time. A member of the professional class, doctors, lawyers, etc., rose to assure those present that the professional men of the district were to a man behind Mr. Bruce, who was, so to speak, a colleague, being a barrister and a magistrate. They would do everything possible to rally patients and clients to Mr. Bruce's support, as they had in the past.

A works manager rose to assure those present that everything possible would be done in the works and pits to ridicule this 'foreigner' nonsense which the chapels behind this Henry Richard were spreading in order to prejudice Mr. Bruce in the eyes of those whom he had served so well and for so long a time. He, the works manager, had no doubt that after he had spoken to the under-managers, bosses on the railbank and others, all that 'a Welshman for Merthyr' nonsense would be laughed at.

Several others also spoke before they left to do all they could for Mr. Bruce and what they referred to as 'the cause'. Beer flowed according to plan, jobs were promised, men had what they called 'dabs in the fist', after which they said: 'You leave that to me, sir.' Some who had received 'dabs in the fist' went about dabbing people wearing opposition colours in the eye. So it went on right up to the eve of the poll, at the declaration of which there were stormy scenes when it became known that Henry Richard was 'in', and Mr. Bruce was 'out'. Mr. Bruce was a very nice man, the chapel people said, and they didn't blame him for any of the beery blackguardism they had encountered during the election campaign. No, Mr. Bruce was not to blame for any of that, and the chapel people had nothing against him personally, but he wasn't a Welshman and a Nonconformist, so – well, there you are. Merthyr was both Welsh and Nonconformist.

CHAPTER VII

HORSES

WILL hurried home from the pit wildly excited, and before he had put his tea-jack and food-box on the window-ledge he held out to Megan the cap he had been carrying in his hand. ‘Here,’ he cried, ‘sew a strong loop on the front of my cap to hold a naked-light lamp, our Megan – an’ one here as well in case I have to carry one o’ them new shield lamps with glass over the flame,’ he added, pointing with his thumb to a place on his waistcoat above his left breast. He threw his tea-jack and food-box on to the window-ledge and began dancing around the table. ‘For I’m a haulier, a *reg’lar* haulier from to-day. Oh, our Megan, my own horse, an’ a fine horse he is too. Captain his name is. I’ll have to get a peechin teen to-night from the cobbler’s – water for me to wash, quick.’

Megan smiling brought a plate heaped with food from the oven to place it on the table. ‘Sit down to your taters an’ meat, daftie. Reg’lar haulier, indeed. Who told you that you’re to be a reg’lar haulier?’

‘Hugh Nannie, the master-haulier did then. Said for me to bring my own peechin teen an’ leading-rein.’

‘But dad wants you to be a collier like him.’

‘But I want to be a haulier, not a collier. I’m sick of cutting an’ filling coal – so I don’t care what dad says. I was driving to-day again instead o’ that Ike Watkins who’s more’n half his time on the spree, an’ Hugh Nannie said that I’m as good a haulier as Ike Watkins is any day. So he wants me to start to-morrow driving between the two double partings.’ He sat the chair jockey-fashion, the

way hauliers underground ride their 'guns'. Then he began shouting as though to a horse. 'Captain, come up, see-whoy, come-heah-whoy -'

'Eat your taters an' meat,' said Megan, laughing. 'We'll see what dad says when he comes in from work. Time he an' Joe were here.'

'Dad can say what he likes, but he shan't stop me from being a reg'lar haulier now I've got the chance.'

'Eat your taters an' meat, I tell you.'

Between mouthfuls the fourteen-year-old boy, who had for six years up to then been working as butty to his father, and other colliers since Joe had been taken on as the father's butty, between mouthfuls Will talked enthusiastically about his change of occupations. 'I've been working for it this good while, ay, ever since I finished working with dad, to let Joe work with him instead. Dad wouldn't let me go out driving a shift now an' then when there were hauliers short. But the other man he did, an' each day I got to handle a horse an' tram better. An' now, now I'm to be a reg'lar haulier -' He choked as half a hot potato stuck in his throat.

'Choke you will in a minute,' said Megan.

'You get the tub for me to wash to go to the cobbler's to get him to fit me for a peechin teen.'

Megan went outside to bring the tub in, for she could understand why the boy was so excited, now that he was to be a member of what might be called a fraternity. The hauliers were the 'pivotal' workmen of the pits their actions so often rendered idle. They were, these men who drove the horses underground, the most indispensable section of a pit's workers, and what was more, they knew it. They went 'on the spree' far oftener than workmen of other grades, and when hauliers returned to work after a few days or a week 'on the spree', overmen wisely refrained from asking where they had been. An overman could with impunity shout at colliers and timbermen who had absented themselves from work: 'Here, where do you reckon you was

yesterday?' and timbermen and colliers would hang their heads and mumble excuses or apologies. But when an overman was so ill-advised as to shout: 'Hoy, where do you reckon you've been lately?' to a haulier or hauliers, the reply he got was: 'Where I shall be to-day if you don't shut that big mouth o' yours.' Then it was the overman mumbled apologetically: 'I was only joking.'

Hauliers required delicate handling if they were to be kept working. They kept themselves to themselves in work, went in gangs to and from work, drank in gangs and 'cork clubs' in public-houses, and in fine weather sat together on the pit-head until the colliers and timbermen and their helpers had all gone down. The overman, raging inwardly, would approach them with an ingratiating smile and say: 'We won't be able to wind coal until you go down to drive it, boys. Everybody's gone down, you know, and time's going on.' The hauliers, with about a dozen doorboys who regarded themselves as members of the fraternity sitting together in the sunshine where the pit's supply of pit-props of all lengths from two to thirteen feet were stacked, the hauliers and doorboys sitting there ignoring the overman's appeals. Some mornings they would drive the poor overman almost off his head by discussing in front of him the question as to whether it was or was not a good day on which to change a sovereign – though not a haulier of them all had as much as a shilling to change. But this they did to test the overman's patience. If he stood the test, well and good. Yes, if he stood there smiling whilst they debated the question they would, all in good time, stretch themselves and move slowly towards the pit-cage that was waiting to shoot them down to their work. But if the overman's good-humour and patience were not equal to the strain the hauliers imposed on him, and he shouted, 'Come on, or get a move on,' or words to that effect, then one of the most cantankerous of the hauliers would take the cork out of his tea-jack and begin pouring his tea out on the ground, saying: 'It is a good day to change a sovereign.'

All the others would follow suit, the overman standing by tearing his hair. He would rave as he stood watching them in a body moving back towards the town they had passed through on their way to the pit less than an hour ago. No hauliers – no work, no, not for anybody.

'What, what can you do with men like that?' the overman moaned to the banksman who with him watched the hauliers, who now were singing on their way back to town, there to mortgage part of their future earnings by 'strapping' – or 'chalking', as others would say – as much beer as an all-day tour of the public-houses would yield. 'The day will come,' the overman he roared, shaking his fist after them, 'the day will come when you'll be glad to be allowed down to work.' Then turning to the banksman he would say like if he was being strangled or something: 'Write, write on the side of an empty tram in chalk. Write to let them know down the pit that these blasted hauliers have turned back again, and that they can all come back up the pit again – well, all except those who've got ripping or blasting they can go at.' So there was no work that day again.

The overman he went about rampaging and cursing and saying all sorts of nasty things about the hauliers who had again 'stopped the pit', as he put it. But the hauliers as a section were far from being as black as overmen painted them. True, they were temperamental, cantankerous, and difficult to handle in the pit, but that's only half the story. They were also skilled workmen who were what might be called 'the first line of attack' against conditions little short of slavery. They struck work on their own behalf, struck in sympathy with doorboys, and all other grades up to aged roadmenders down the pit.

When down the pit at their work they did work, and work hard. From the pit-bottom, where they stepped off the pit-cage, they proceeded to the stables hewn out of the rock, where their horses, most of them greasy-heeled, were feeding. They each 'tacked' their horses, 'tacked' meaning

harnessing. Then in line, each haulier behind his own horse, holding fast to its tail, they proceeded into the workings, into the double-partings of the different seams. On the double-partings, which had a double roadway, one for empty, the other for loaded trams, the hauliers attached to the harness of their horses iron shafting. Then with what they called the 'gun' they attached an empty iron tram to the horse's iron shafting. As already stated these iron 'guns' were shaped like a swan's neck, and they were about a yard long. The bottom end was pinned to the hitching-plate of the tram by an iron pin called the 'big pin'. That done, the haulier shouted 'stand back' to his horse, and the horse backed to allow the bill-like end of the 'gun' to enter a slot in the back of its shafting, where it was fixed by an iron pin called 'the little pin'. Then the hauliers were ready to drive into the workings with the empty trams which colliers, with trams loaded with coal in their roadways, waited for. Empty trams for loaded trams, all the day long. Thousands of hauliers in hundreds of pits driving inwards with empty trams, to return from where they started with trams loaded with coal. If the distance a haulier and his horse had to travel was more or less level, then he worked two empty trams forward, to bring two trams loaded with coal back out in exchange, but if it was up from what he called 'a deep', he had to bring trams loaded with coal, then it was only one tram at a time he worked. The trams when loaded properly held anything from a ton to thirty-hundredweight of coal.

These trams empty and loaded the horses pulled through dust and sludge throughout a twelve-hour day, often longer, and the hauliers had to negotiate the passage of those trams around dangerous bends, up and down steep inclines, and they did it with the aid of their horses, and by 'spragging' the wheels of their trams with wooden sprags. Often they had to drive through what they called 'swamps', stretches of roadway under water, where the water was up to the horses' bellies. For driving in water of that depth the

hauliers they got notes for to have beer on the way home at night, for the day of overtime money was not yet. So if the hauliers were what the bosses called 'a drunken lot', then the bosses were largely responsible for making them so by giving them notes for beer instead of overtime money for driving through water all day in the dark.

Some pits were dry and very dusty, others were wet and very sludgy. Travelling the roadways of the dry pits, the horses they disturbed the coal dust and rock dust that was always burying the rails out of sight, like sand on a desert buries things out of sight. The haulier riding the 'gun' jockey fashion had to swallow a lot of the dust his horse kicked up, or stop breathing, which he could not do for long. When the dust rose so far above the rails as to make it almost impossible for the horses to pull trams through it, then a bit of what was called 'dusting' had to be done. That is to say, that after or between shifts, the hauliers in couples filled the dust off the roadways into empty trams, and for this extra work they also got notes for beer. That was in the dry and dusty pits, which were mostly very hot to work in, much hotter than the wet and sludgy pits to work in. But on the whole they, the dry and dusty pits, were not so killing for horses and hauliers as were the wet and sludgy pits – well, not at the time, anyway. No doubt the dust in the dry and dusty pits, which the hauliers could not help swallowing, did in the long run send a lot of them into what was called the 'decline', the slow 'decline', not the quicker sort of 'decline' that took the hauliers in the wet and sludgy pits. Though perhaps it was their sitting in the public-houses in their wet clothes to drink the beer the bosses had given them for getting wet, that made the 'decline' so fast in their case.

For they were bound to get very wet, these hauliers in the wet and sludgy pits. For trams often 'jumped the rails' when travelling through swamps in which there was about two feet of water standing – and little or no pumping being done. 'Swamps,' as the hauliers called them, were like the

bottom of basons into which water ran to settle from two rising sides or slopes; it was 'slopes' the hauliers called the ground rising both ways out of the swamps where their trams often jumped the rails. Then there was a pantomime, if you like. Groping in two feet of water with your shirt off, standing in water above your knees with your shirt off, groping for the displaced rails. And the tram with anything from a ton to thirty-hundredweight of coal in it deep below the rails in sludge and water. Splosh, splosh, oh, what a pantomime. The aged roadmender was cursed – the menders and layers of the railway of the underground roadways were made up of men too old for any other job, and men who had lost a limb at other work – and he would whine: 'Who can keep rails tidy in their place deep under water. It is divers, not roadmenders, is wanted here.' 'Never mind botherin' now,' Hugh Nannie, the master-haulier, would shout, 'we've got to get this tram from here. It's blocking everything, and the pit's waiting for coal, the pit's waiting for coal.' Hugh Nannie, he always talked as though the pit was a starving man waiting for food, a starving man with two cages for mouths waiting for food. So come on, let's get this tram from here somehow. Easier said than done, Hugh Nannie, frantic standing there up to your backside in water. The overman, would, of course, come on from the pit-bottom to see what was holding things up, and soon there would be lights all over the place, and everybody cursing flashes. There was no room to unload the coal out of the tram, which was the last thing to be attempted, but there was little room, for it cost money to keep roadways wide and high enough to unload trams of coal when off the rails. 'It's no good standing there in the water, cursing all time,' the overman, standing clear of the water himself, would shout at Hugh Nannie. 'Get the damned thing from there,' he would add, cursing himself now. Easier said than done. 'No use,' Hugh Nannie said at last, 'the horse'll have to pull it from there.' Easier said than done,

Hugh Nannie. 'All right, stand clear everybody,' cried the haulier, hitching the horse to the tram off the rails deep in sludge and water. Somehow a length of spare rails are made a run-up from under tram-wheels deep down. The haulier would pat his horse's neck. 'It's up to you now, Dandy, boy,' he would say to the horse. 'Out o' the way an' give him a chance, everybody. Now, Dandy. Come up.' From his 'gun', which in water now he lifted, not rode, he encouraged the horse to pull his heart out. The horse seems to be stretching like a couple of yards of flame-coloured elastic as he strains and strains - oh, coal. Come up, Dandy - he's shifting. Good old Dandy. Up and forward a foot he has managed to pull it before he sags quivering all over. 'Give him a spell a minute,' advises the overman from where he stands on high-dry ground. The haulier pats Dandy. 'You can do it, Dandy, boy. Me an' you'll get it from here, won't we?' 'Try him again,' shouts Hugh Nannie. 'If you don't shut up I'll fill your mouth with a sprag,' says the haulier, smoothing the body of the horse, Dandy, which is quivering like a - well, like whatever has been overstrained in the service of mankind from the beginning of time. 'Never mind that talk,' shouts the overman, 'get that tram from there, that's enough for you two to do.' 'When you're ready, Dandy, boy,' says the haulier. Again the horse stretched like elastic in the sludgy water - 'Keep it going, keep it going,' shouts Hugh Nannie. More of the horse appearing out of sludgy water, out of the swamp, and if the horse moves then the tram must be moving - it is - 'Yes, keep it going,' the overman is now shouting. Tram out of sludgy water on higher, drier ground, where the horse, Dandy, hitched to it, trembles inside his iron shafting, trembles and trembles.... The haulier embraces his horse's neck. 'Didn't I say me an' you'd do it, Dandy?' Now it can be lifted on to the rails again to travel back to the pit which is waiting, always waiting for coal, the pit, the deep-down mouth of the world hungry for coal. And

the horse, Dandy, all trembly on his four stout legs with their greasy heels in the dark.

In the swamp many men now groping to find the displaced rails and fix them. Some of the hauliers – may God forgive them – lose their tempers when the brave horses fail to do what many men have failed to do, and those hauliers in their rage, they kick the squelchy, greasy heels of the horse so brave and dumb and patient, and, not satisfied with kicking his greasy heels they go on to beat him about the head with one of the wooden sprags. Hauliers bad after too much beer inside, too much water outside, the sludgy water of the swamps, hauliers whose pride is injured when they are what they call ‘a journey’ behind other hauliers, and are being harried by Hugh Nannie and other master-hauliers, such hauliers everywhere losing their tempers and beating their horses. Horses.

It was the horses Will was most excited about this evening. Like all the other boys of his age made men at fourteen in all the pits, he admires the hauliers for their independence, the way ‘they tells the bosses straight’, but it is the fact that to-morrow morning a horse in the pit named ‘Captain’ will be known henceforth as ‘Will Davies’s horse’, that is what makes him he can hardly sleep for excitement.

All his talk was of horses, and he was no different from most other boys. When he was small Will had seen Mr. Cook of Cook’s Circus drive forty horses in ‘the grand turn-out’ through the main street of Merthyr. Yes, forty horses by himself he drove. High up on top of a high carriage he was, with the ends of the long reins in his hands. The reins, they went through the rings on the shaft-horses’ harness, on through rings in the shiny harness of the next three horses in front, and so on to the leading horse of the forty horses which the man, Mr. Cook, so cleverly handled by himself.

That was a day if you like, that day when Cook’s Circus

came to Merthyr. The hauliers, being so interested in horses, stopped all the pits that day, and the puddlers left their work in the works to look after itself, whilst they went to line the street all the way from Merthyr to Dowlais. 'Come an' see the grand turn-out,' they cried as leaving the works like children. A robber could easily have robbed all the houses in the place that day, for there was nobody left in the houses except those fast in their beds with the 'decline' or something. All the rest of the people were lining the street, watching the grand turn-out, in which Mr. Cook drove forty horses by himself. Of course there were other horses besides the forty Mr. Cook drove in the grand turn-out. There were the six all-white horses pulling the carriage on top of which a woman dressed like Britannia on the tails side of a penny sat, with other women on a platform below her. Indians riding bareback, Romans in chariots, soldiers of all sorts on horseback, not real soldiers, but men of the Circus dressed up. Then the brass band, b'longing to the Circus – the men playing dressed in uniforms – in a wagon playing. There was a man dressed like a clown on the seat of the band-wagon, another clown riding a mule in the grand turn-out, and another clown who was walking on his own two feet, he gave bills in the hands of those lining the street. That was a day if you like.

So Will, like most other boys of the district, was daft about horses, of which there were so many about. Starting from the bottom up, up from the pit to the stables up behind Cyfarthfa Castle, there were ever so many horses for to see. Therè were p'raps twenty pits, and in each of them many horses – say twenty horses in each. That's about four hundred horses under the ground of our district alone, Will was thinking in bed, now that he couldn't sleep for thinking of the horse 'Captain'. Yes, four hundred, and fine horses they are, too. Cost a lot of money they did when they came first out of the country to stand in Waun Fair. They had to be strong horses before they were

bought by the agents for the different collieries. Five years of underground work crocked most of them, who after about five years were sent up the pit to go about blind, doing light work about the pit-head, or in carts pulling housecoal around the houses, before they were handed over to the horse-slaughterer.

The work they were sent up from the pit to do was not what one might call light work. They pulled trams of pit-refuse up to the tip, and brought empties back down, into which men loaded timber and rails and other material to go down the pit. The horses after five years underground in sludge, and water, were rather slow-moving, so they had to be made stir their stumps – for their legs were stiff as ‘stumps’ by this time. But here and there one came across a horse on a pit-head working, whose legs were not stiff as stumps. A fine young horse, and people who saw him wondered why he was above ground doing what any old crock could very well do.

Well, the young horses one saw working about the pit-heads, were those the best hauliers had failed to ‘break in’ to the work down the pit. When bought by our agent, who went round the fairs buying for the colliery companies, and who often had to give as much as eighty golden sovereigns for a good horse, the horse was at once sent to the pit to be put on the cage to be taken down the pit. Getting new horses on to the pit-cage on top of the pit, and off the pit-cage at the pit-bottom, was a pantomime if you like. As the horses were being first coaxed, and then dragged and beaten towards the pit-cage, they would rear an’ kick an’ squeal, an’ many of them in their fright would make water not because they wanted to. Same when trying to get them off the cage at the pit-bottom, where they were frightened by the dark made ruddy in patches by oil-flares. It was all so different from the fields of Hereford, Monmouth, or wherever they, the horses, had come from to our pits.

On to the stables hewn out of the rock they were somehow

driven, pushed, pulled and beaten. A few were mild, not many, but a few submitted to the new conditions without causing much difficulty. But most were difficult at first, and a few rare spirits amongst the new horses constantly required to replace the old, were unmanageable, and had to be sent back up to the world above. When a new horse that was difficult came, two expert hauliers were told off to 'break him in'. Two hauliers 'breaking the spirit' and making docile the new horse. One haulier riding the 'gun', from where he shouted commands, another haulier walking ahead of the horse to see that he didn't take the wrong turning or do anything silly like. A week's attention from two hauliers who wouldn't stand a lot of old nonsense, was in most cases sufficient to reduce the most stubborn of horses to that state where a fourteen-year-old haulier could without difficulty handle him alone. But now and again a horse whose spirit no couple of hauliers could break, and make to be submissive to the dark. Cunning hauliers and cruel hauliers were in turn allowed to try their tricks on the unmanageable new horse – for which all that money had been paid so recently at the fair. Hauliers tried all ways and failed, and the horse declared to be more trouble than he was worth was sent back up the pit to work on the pit-head at jobs any old crock could do; and that was how a fine young horse was sometimes found working on a pit-head in the daylight.

In addition to the horses working down pits, there were the horses working in the dark of coal-levels and drifts which were not pits. Had no pit-shafts these places, so one could walk on one's own two legs off the mountain-side, and out of the daylight into the dark and forward to the coal-face. The horses working in such coal-levels and drifts came out with the hauliers at the end of each shift, came out to stables in the winter, and fields in the summer, so they were much better off than the horses who had to stay down pits all the time. Much happier they were than the horses down the pits, for that was easy to see in the

summer when they were rolling about in fields, and after rolling, getting up to stretch their back-legs one after the other. That was what horses in stables hewn out of the rock, and situated near pit-bottoms, could not do. No room down there to roll about and stretch back-legs one after the other.

The only other horses in the district that had anything to do with coal were those which drew coal-carts about the district, at which quite a number of them were employed. For men employed in the works and pits had coal delivered to their houses at privileged rates, and as there were thousands of such men working in works and down pits, many horses were required to haul the coal around to their houses. Many of these horses were horses which had previously worked in pits, and their heels were still greasy as the result. Now they pulled coal-carts loaded with tons of coal from where the trucks stood, around to colliers' and hauliers' and ironworkers' houses. About ten loads of a ton apiece each day these horses drawing coal-carts do, but still it's up in the daylight, and the cart doesn't go off the hard road and down deep into sludge as did the trams they used to pull along rails underground. So these horses are not so badly-off now.

In the ironworks there are few horses now that the little engines are running around and doing everything that wants doing in the way of transportation. But there are still a few places in the ironworks the engines cannot get to, to fetch things, and there are still a couple of tram-lines over which only horses can pull trams loaded with ashes and things. An engine is no good on a tram-line, no more good than a horse is on a railway line. So there are still a few horses left in the works pulling trams about.

There are no engines or railway lines in the brickyards, so it is all horses there still. They pull the trams loaded with clay from the clay-pit to the brickyard, and in carts they pull loads of bricks out of the brickyards to wherever they are wanted. What they call 'clay-pits' are more like

quarries than pits, but it is 'clay-pits' they call them all the same. Then the horses who draw trams loaded with clay from the 'clay-pits', also draw trams loaded with small-coal to feed the fires, inside which in sealed brick ovens the bricks are baked. So they are bound to keep horses in the brickyards.

The only other horses seen doing really dirty work – though it's not so dirty as all that, either – in the district, are the many 'canal-boat-horses' who are here one day and gone the next. They travel the canal bank, pulling the long and strong rope which is attached to the canal barge. There is a boy in charge of each canal-horse, and it is usually his father who is the crew of the barge. There must be hundreds of these barges travelling between Merthyr and Cardiff, so there must be hundreds of canal-boat-horses as well. These are steady horses well known to the men who live in little houses near the locks, some of whom are called 'lock-keepers'. The canal-boat-horses are fairly good-looking horses, and appear as though they are fairly well looked after. They see a lot more than the horses who never leave our district once they come into it, and so there is the look of rather jaded travellers in the eyes of the canal-boat-horses, and that Will and other boys could easily see when they went swimming in the locks of the canal, and had to hurry out of the water to stand naked on the bank as the canal-boat-horse came along pulling the boat after him. Whilst the boat was being lowered into the lock, the canal-boat-horse stood a few yards in advance, near the next low-level, waiting for the boat to come down and out to him, and the look in his eyes as he turned his head to look back on the naked boys, was the condescending look of the much-travelled for the homely. No wonder either, for these horses did their two return trips each week, and that's a hundred miles each week, five thousand two hundred miles each year – and that's travelling if you like.

Anyway, the canal-boat-horses could not properly be

called our horses, or regarded as belonging to our district, or any district for that matter, for like sailors, they only had ports, but no proper homes. Now the brewery horses we could call our horses, for no matter how far they went each day, they came back to Merthyr each night. Three breweries we had, and each was noted for its horses. Talk about horses. It is no exaggeration to say that a man could make his bed and go to sleep in it on any one of our brewery horses' broad backs. One brewery's horses were one colour, the other brewery's horses another colour. And what a size they were. The colours were always pure, never mixed. Iron greys, browns, white, black.

Sweet-smelling, well-groomed horses, these brewery horses. No greasy heels. Oh, no. Clean hair over their heels falling like the top of a cavalier's boot down to blackened hooves, which were kept blacker and cleaner than most of the men of the district kept their boots. Standing huge, high and majestic outside our public-houses, these horses were a sight. The draymen, most of whom lived by suction, for it was little they ate, went on lowering barrels into cellars, whilst the horses they stood still like sculptured groups Titanic.

The draymen were proud of their horses, loved their big and beautiful horses. Never used a whip on 'em - didn't need to. The one objection Will and the other boys had to the brewery horses was that they never galloped, never even trotted. Only, like the dignified creatures they were, only walked.

But the bus horses they trotted now and then along level ground. The horses of the district's only bus-service were fine horses. As tall, but not near as heavy as the brewery horses. But fine horses all the same. All day they travelled the hard road from Merthyr to Dowlais and back, which was hard work, for it is uphill all the way from Merthyr to Dowlais. Still, it is all downhill on the way back.

To finish with the horses who drew people about, the

horses who pulled brakes about come next. Though we only had one bus-service, we had many brake services. From the Market Square – where soldiers have more than once piled arms – you could get a brake to practically anywhere within a radius of five miles. Brakes to Cefn, Pentrebach, Abercanaid, Troedyrhiw, Penyrheolgerrig, and places as far away as Treharris, which was nearly seven miles away. For the older people were still afraid of what they called ‘the old train’, and so were many young people after one train, running in, bumped a standing train clean out of the railway station and across the road, the cobbled road where the cabs stand, to crash into the wall in front of the Temperance Hall. So people who were afraid of ‘the old train’ travelled by brake for the rest of their lives, that’s when it was too far to walk, of course. Anything up to three miles, when travelling light, was a pleasure to walk, but if one’s objective was over three miles, then one was not sneered at for riding in a brake, for one could always use ‘time’ as an excuse for not using one’s legs when the distance to be covered was over three miles. We had one-horse, two-horse, and three-horse brakes, which seated eleven, seventeen and twenty-one respectively, the odd one in each case being the one who sat in front with the driver. The others sat facing each other with their knees touching, and making a sort of table on which to rest loaded market-baskets and parcels. Never mind the passengers though, it’s the horses in the shafts of the brakes we are considering. Most of them could move along the hard roads pretty fast until the last few trips of the day, when they could only walk an’ trot, trot a little and walk a lot.

Then there were the cab-horses, and the sleek and fast horses which were being seen for the first time pulling about a funny thing which those who ought to know called a ‘hansom-cab’. It was like a woman’s bonnet, Will thought, only bigger a lot, of course, and when one, or two at most, got inside it, gates closed over their knees an’ locked ’em in.

Then the driver he was high up behind the contraption, sitting on what seemed like a slotted seat with a six-inch iron railing only to support his back. He sat up there holding the reins which went clear over the bonnet-like contraption to the bridle of the horse drawing it about so swiftly. The driver he also had a longer whip than the drivers of our old four-wheeled cabs, and on top of the contraption there was a little window which he could open to talk down at the people inside it. It was long before the people of the district could make head or tail of the contraption which they were told was a 'hansom-cab'. Any-way, they were drawn by fast horses, horses almost as fast as the horses which raced in the Big Field when the sports were on.

It was funny how people, no sooner the hansom-cab appeared, began referring to the horses in four-wheeled cabs as 'old cab-horses', meaning, no doubt, that the cabs they pulled about were now old-fashioned. For they couldn't say that the horses themselves were old, for many of them had a gallop in 'em to give out when it was wanted, an' people willing to pay for it. Oh, yes, they could skip it when they liked.

Then there were the fast little ponies drawing 'floats', as the little flat carts were called, loaded with fish, fruit and vegetables about the district to places where the Marketing Act of William the Fourth did not apply. By that act everybody in and around Merthyr itself had to come into the Market to sell, and anybody within the prescribed radius selling from a cart, off pavements, up lanes or courts, etc., was liable to a fine not exceeding forty shillings. But these fast little ponies were driven by the costers, which some called hawkers, others hucksters, outside the radius covered by the Marketing Act of William the Fourth; though the stuff they sold retail they bought wholesale from the wholesale men in the Market itself. But it's the fast and hard-working little ponies that matter for the moment. Oh, the loads they pulled up over

Dowlais top and down to the valleys of the Three Companies: the Rhymney valley, which the Rhymney Iron and Coal Company ruled the top-end of, the next, the Sirhowy valley, which the Tredegar Iron and Coal Company ruled the top-end of, and the next again, the Ebbw Vale valley, which the Ebbw Vale Iron and Coal Company ruled the top-end of. Over from Merthyr these little ponies conveyed loads on flat floats on two wheels, and on top of the loads their owners, the hucksters, costers – what you will, crying, ‘hake-alive-o’, and other cries through three valleys to sell out, and return to Merthyr tired late at night. Good little ponies these were.

There were the horses, cobs and ponies owned and driven by either the professional gentlemen of the district or by their coachmen, for many of our professional gentlemen had coachmen, or coachmen-gardeners when they couldn’t afford a full-time coachman. Yes, some of our doctors and lawyers had fine horses, carriage-horses and riding-horses, but not such good horses as those Mr. Robert Crawshay – who was none too well again – kept for riding and driving in the stables behind Cyfarthfa Castle.

Then there was an old man with a wooden leg – he was none too well, either – who owned a little old pony that had for twenty years worked in a coal-level. No, no, it was twenty years old now, and its coat was woolly grey in patches. The old man who now owned him lived in what you might call the shadow of Cyfarthfa Castle, in the district of Cae-pant-tywyll, which in English means: ‘The field in the dark hollow.’ There may have been a field there once – no doubt there was – but now it’s all little houses nice and convenient for those working in the Cyfarthfa works, being next door, and almost inside it. The old man with the wooden leg living in one of the houses here had at one time worked in the works, where he lost his leg somehow. So he got this little old pony for a few shillings, just when they who owned it then were going to send for

the horse-slaughterer, who wouldn't have given them much for it, anyway, for it was little cats' an' dogs' meat the little pony was carrying on its bones. The old man made a bit of a cart with his wife's help, and when it was finished with one wheel a bit higher than the other, he set off to where he knew he could get some sandstone without any bother, for there was plenty of it. On Mondays and Tuesdays he dug and hauled the sandstone. On Wednesdays and Thursdays the pony rested whilst the old man and his wife with iron pounders pounded the sandstone into sand, which on Fridays and Saturdays they put on the old cart for the old pony to draw around people's houses, houses in which lived people who sanded their stone floors over the week-ends, and the sand to do it with they bought a penn'orth a bread-tin full from the old man and his wife. Every Sunday the old man and his wife went twice as regular as clockwork to Cae-pant-tywyll Chapel. Considering its age this little pony was a good pony to the old couple who sold sand.

Another good old little pony was the pony owned and driven by the old man who came round the houses selling cockles at so much per imperial quart in their shells. Then the man who came round selling lamp-oil had a good little pony, too, a younger pony than the cockle- and sand-men's ponies. Several grocers, they had horses for delivering goods to people who bought more than could be conveniently carried, and who lived on the outskirts of the town. Head-men at the works and down the pits had ponies and traps, so did nearly all our publicans.

Perhaps the horses who brought the market women, with market produce to sell in the Market on Fridays and Saturdays, are not properly horses to be considered here, but as we have already said a little about canal-boat-horses we can't very well ignore these horses from the outside. From over the Black Mountain and Brecknock's Beacons they came to Merthyr Market every week as regular as the clock with butter, eggs, bacon and poultry and cheese full

the covered wagons in winter. Whatever the weather over the Black Mountain, they had to have the produce in the covered wagon, displayed first thing Friday morning on the stalls they rented in Merthyr Market, where such produce fetched such good prices to help pay farms' rent. When all was sold by Saturday night, things required were bought in the busy town of Merthyr, and put into covered wagons which through the night travelled back home over the Black Mountain. Merthyr Market was *the Market of Wales*. 'On no account,' said the country people with things to sell, 'can we miss Merthyr's weekly Market.'

The tinker-gypsies, who lived in vans and tents hidden in about a dozen hollows on the outskirts of Merthyr, had horses, too, mostly ill-fed and bony nags. But they served to draw the carts loaded with pots, pans and pegs around the houses in streets and rows, through which the gipsy-women went impudently selling, and offering to tell fortunes.

Donkeys are not horses, we know, but in the district scores of them had to do the work of horses. Hundreds of people in the district kept pigs either in front or behind their houses in pig-sties, and they all tried to keep down feeding-costs by going around the wasteful town collecting wash. Huge up-ended barrels on wheels the little donkeys drew behind them. Shafts attached to the huge barrel on wheels, in the shafts a donkey. 'Come up, Neddy.' The donkeys were not fed well, the most they got was the driest of the pigs' food collected. A handful of potato-peeling, a few cabbage-leaves, 'here you are, Neddy.' Few of the donkeys had stables for winter, or fields in which to gambol and graze through summers. A long iron bar driven deep down into the ash-tip behind houses, and to this bar by a long chain the donkey was secured to spend his leisure time. He had a radius of about twenty yards around his iron bar to prowl around, crying 'hee-haw' through hungry nights. After dark, bands of boys would steal up to mount him in turn, and in

cruel ways they made him ride them around and around the bar until he at last collapsed under one of them with a long despairing 'hee-haw'. Next morning when he could hardly stand whilst being harnessed to the huge wash-barrel on wheels its owner would say: 'I don't know what's come over this old donkey lately.'

Anyway, they were only donkeys after all. There were ever so many other horses worthy of mention in the district, horses such as hunters owned by a couple of gentlemen who went hunting now and then in the next county. Then the many stallions of various sizes and pedigrees which went about the district in due season, led around by horsey-looking men who knew no more of shame than did the stallions themselves. These men they led the stallions to all sorts of places where 'the horse' was expected. '*The Horse.*' Horses – horses everywhere.

To cap it all there was the Waun Fair held on the table-land above the district each year. An historic fair, a horse-fair, the Mecca of horse-dealers. From England some of them came. Along the hard roads before dawn of the morning of Waun Fair, horses, ones, twos, threes, and in long strings, heads fastened to tails, the halter of each succeeding horse fastened to the straw-plaited tail of the horse in front. Horses ridden, driven and led from all quarters to assemble on the upland plateau. From distant farms up over mountains and down into the smoky, dirty furnace-flaming town. Up out of the town on to the plateau where the buyers with gold in bags wait. 'Good-bye sweet and peaceful farm,' is what many of the horses might say if able to speak.

Colliery agents the most likely buyers, for the horses in the pits wore out so quickly. The colliery agents they walk around, so do the head-ostlers employed by brewers. 'Examine that horse's mouth.' 'Yes, that's his age.' 'Let's see him move.' All movement to and fro the plateau. 'Some fine horses here to-day.' Why, where should they be? Isn't that place down there the place

that uses up more horses each year than any other place in the world? Of course it is. Can you get better prices anywhere in the world than you get here for your horse-flesh? I doubt it, sir.

The colliery agents go about buying, and each horse bought for the pit is by an ostler from the pit strung on to another horse. Many strings for many pits before the Fair is over. The farmers and horse-dealers return the way they came with gold made from coal, and the horses they have exchanged for it go in sad strings towards the pits they will get to know only too well. Other horses bought go to better homes, to a better job. Horses all the time on the move above ground and underground; so is it any wonder that Will is daft about horses, can't sleep this night for thinking of the horse named 'Captain' which he is to drive down the pit to-morrow?

CHAPTER VIII

FIGHT FOLLOWS FUNERAL

JUST as though their two lives were on the same string, 'as you might say,' was what Martha James said when she came at last. She had just finished laying-out old bopa Lloyd, now she had hurried down to do as much for Megan's mother. 'All the same, I thought your old bopa Lloyd would have lasted till she was a hundred, God help her. But there, it wasn't to be. Old Marged Ellis - an' she's getting on towards the eighty mark - oh, before I forget. She said for me to mind to tell you an' that sister o' yours to be sure to be up there for the reading of your bopa Lloyd's will after the funeral. But there, I expect you'll be burying your poor mother the same day. Do you know, now that she's laid out nice up there, old bopa Lloyd looks better now than she've looked for years. I expect she's left a tidy bit of money. There's them houses she's got along the Tramroad, over on the British Tip an' down Cae-draw. Talk about an old grab. If ever there was one, then it was your old bopa Lloyd. And there she is now, God help her. Where have you got her, my gel?'

'Got who?' said Megan.

'Your poor mother, God help her.'

'Oh, upstairs on the bed.'

'H'm. I think we'd better have her down from there, for you'll have an awful job getting her down them stairs in her coffin, better have her down to this bed on the floor before - but don't you bother, my gel. Go you next door to talk to Susan for a bit. I'll manage her. Better do it now than later, for I remember the trouble they had to get

Shoni Rees the bottom house down the stairs in his coffin. I told 'em enough when I went there to lay him out, for you know how stout he was. Go you next door to Susan for a minute, good gel,' she said, pushing Megan out of the house and locking the door.

Martha James, middle-aged and powerful, was the district's most efficient hit-or-miss midwife. 'Laying-out' was her second line of business. A barren woman who, after twenty-five years experience, knew quite a lot about the incoming and outgoing of the human family. As good as any two doctors at a difficult confinement, said some. Then the ointment she made from herbs and something out of pigs had effected cures, she claimed, where doctors had been helpless. Having no children of her own, she kept pigs in the pig-sty at the bottom of the bit o' garden in front of the house she lived in up Incline Top. She also had a donkey to pull about the up-ended barrel on wheels with which she sent her husband in his working-clothes all over town collecting pigs' wash. She, Martha James, had no room to talk about anyone being an 'old grab', for she was enough of an old grab herself, goodness knows.

Her husband he worked nights in Dowlais works, nights always, from six at night when he started, till six in the morning when he finished, finished working in Dowlais works. It was nearly half-past six each morning when he reached home. Then, as soon as he had breakfast, 'see to the pigs', it was. There was the bit o' garden as well. Well, after seeing to the pigs, loose the donkey off his chain and harness him to the up-ended barrel, then off down-town to fill the barrel with pigs' wash before coming home to wash himself all over and go to bed for a few hours' sleep before leaving the house about half-past five for his work in Dowlais works. He spent about eighteen hours of each twenty-four in his working-clothes, Sundays excepted. Then Martha James, who sent him round after wash for the pigs every day, had the cheek to speak of other people as 'old grabs'. She was more of an old grab

than any. And for what? Without chick or child, her husband earning good money in the works, she earning with confinements and layings-out, and selling that ointment she made – an’ on top of it all, keeping pigs. The rent of their house was only three-and-six a week, a Company house it was. It was with many other houses in four rows situated, as it were, on the upper lip of a sort of huge crater made by tipping works refuse in a molten state both sides and close to the houses. Also a man-made mountain of boiler ashes which was all the time burning sulphureously – but sulphur is good for certain complaints – to help keep warm the two man-made mountains of furnace refuse which had cooled down into big boulders, between which after years tough grass took root blade by blade.

Martha James said that where she lived and kept pigs up the Incline Top was the healthiest place in the district, and, if she was anything to go by, then it was; but judging from the look of her husband, it wasn’t.

However, and whether it was or wasn’t, Martha wasn’t a bad sort after all. In appearance she was the dead spit of our Queen Victoria – Martha was, if anything, a bit taller – yes, a good bit taller. In the hour of imminence she would stand no nonsense from expectant mothers, neither was she open to receive suggestions from relations regarding the laying-out of their dead. ‘I hope I knows by now how to make a poor body look tidy over the few days lying before it’s took to the Cefn,’ Martha would most chillingly say in reply to those foolish enough to make suggestions. When she killed a pig – as she was well able to after seeing the butcher who wanted paying do it twice only – when she killed a pig she often shared the bit o’ belly-pork amongst the poorest ‘of the homes she was visiting in her dual capacity.

Once ‘the job’, as she called it, was over, she looked for a cup of tea, ‘an’ a drop more if there’s any left in the pot’, over which she would talk of things past, present and to come – and it wasn’t wise to interrupt her flow of talk.

Of course, when she asked you if you remembered something or other, it was well to say 'yes' at once, for if you said 'no' or even looked doubtful, she would say: 'Of course you remember. For you were alive at the time - an' in your right mind, I hope - when it happened. Don't you remember . . .'

Megan was sitting in next door with Susan and Susan's mother when Martha James called over the low wall between the two houses to say she could come in now. 'There she is, God help her, looking tidy enough for the neighbours to come an' pay their respects when they like,' said Martha to Megan, waving a hand towards the down-stairs bedroom. 'Yes, indeed, lovely,' murmured Megan, looking down on her mother so still and peaceful like. 'Last night she seemed as though she had come to know our dad again. Didn't say anything, but she reached for his hand on the bed to hold it a minute.'

'Some do come back to their senses after being simple for a bit 'fore they go,' said Martha. 'I could drink a cup o' tea if -'

'To be sure,' said Megan, hurrying to make it out in the living-room.

'Better leave the door open,' said Martha, opening it to sit near it. 'An' if I was you, Megan fach, I'd keep it open most of the day - though she haven't started to go yet. Do your father know - but of course he don't, or he wouldn't be at his work in the pit. Thank you, my gel,' she said, taking a cup of tea from Megan, who poured one for herself. 'I expect that old Marged Ellis have put herself right in your old bopa Lloyd's will, more fool her if she haven't. She's had the old woman to do what she liked with for goodness knows how long now. I've been trying to think - But no, not for the life o' me can I remember who the old woman was bopa to altogether. Everybody b'longing to her called her "bopa", but whose real bopa was she?'

'Mam told me that bopa Lloyd was bopa first to her mother - p'raps you remember her?'

'Your grandmother? What's stopping me to remember her. Old Selina an' my mother - Now I've got it, she's only bopa to your mother's side. So half that regiment that have been teaching their children to say "bopa" to the old woman don't b'long to her any more'n I do. Don't forget what I told you about old Marged Ellis wanting you an' your sister up there for the reading of the will. Where is that sister o' yours now?'

'Where her husband is selling somewhere up in England.'

'Of course she ran away with that Cheap Jack, didn't she - is she married to him?'

'To be sure she is, an' whoever says that she isn't is saying old lies.'

'That's what I said to them who told me that she was living tally with the man. Have you sent to tell her about your mother?'

'No, I'm waiting for Joe to come home from work for him to write in a letter to her.'

'Nice to have one in the house able to write the English a bit. Is there a drop more tea?'

'To be sure,' said Megan, pouring it. 'Yes, our Joe can write, for he went to school for a bit. Mam was thinking to put him behind the counter of a shop.'

'There now; but women are always soft about their youngest. I must go as soon as I swallow this drop o' tea, go to look for that husband o' mine that's gone after wash with the donkey. He must try to get a bit o' sleep before going to his work to-night again. Oh, Megan fach, there's a lot to do where there's pigs.'

'No doubt.'

Martha gulped her tea and went off in search of her husband and the donkey pulling the up-ended barrel on wheels. As soon as she had gone the neighbours they came one after the other to view the body of Megan's mother, as was customary as soon as a body had been laid out 'tidy'. In ones and in twos they came to look and say: 'She looks lovely, God help her.' It didn't do to stop the neighbours coming

in to view one's dead, for if they were not made welcome, then their men-folk might not turn up in their bit o' black to walk in the funeral – and Megan wanted her mother to have a tidy funeral. But for thinking of her dad in the pit not knowing yet, she couldn't pay much attention to what her neighbours were saying. Throughout the day they were coming and going, the neighbours and relations. First her brother Llewelyn's wife – Norah Delaney, that was – came with her children. She was lovely, Norah was, and she kept the children spotless. But she was boss of Llewelyn, whose children she took to Mass with her every Sunday morning. Their name Davies, and she determined to make Catholics of them. Their grandfather, Dan Delaney, who is one of the tidiest Irishmen working in Dowlais works, thinks the world of Norah's fine half-and-half children.

Elias's wife came as well with her children. Miriam was Welsh, and her children went to Zoar Chapel with her. Sam's widow, Eileen, didn't come, for she had married again, an Irishman this time, and had gone to live with him over Tredegar, where her second husband was working in the works there. Neither did Owen's widow come either, for she is married again too, but she lives with her second husband in the same house in which she had lived with Owen when he was alive. Between 'em all, and putting a cup o' tea for one and the other, Megan had to hurry to get the taters an' meat ready for her dad and the two boys, who were later than usual.

In walked her dad with the two boys at his heels, Megan looking at him as he put his food-box and tea-jack on the window-ledge. He turned from the window and was about to sit down in the arm-chair when she said: 'Then you haven't heard, dad?'

'About what, my gel?'

She told him best she could, pointing to the curtain hiding the body of her mother in the downstairs bedroom. 'Martha James said better bring her down from upstairs,'

she said, then opened the oven to reach the plates of taters an' meat for 'em. The two boys didn't seem to feel the loss of their mother much, for to them she had been as good as dead a long time. But Rhys sat stunned in the arm-chair for long before he rose to go into the downstairs bedroom to look down on her. Standing there black in his pit-clothes moaning: 'I killed you a long, long time ago, Ann annwyl.' Megan led him out and back to the arm-chair, where he sat looking out of eyes hell's-wells of pain at nothing. His body, his big body shrinking inside his pit-clothes for lack of the sustaining power no longer available. His years of neglect and ill-treatment of her now gone for ever, sprouting years by the million to weigh him down, down, down into the deepest of hell's pits, the bottomless pit. Into his throat from somewhere deep inside him came feeling thickened into clots which almost choked him as he tried to prevent it coming out to break him in pieces in front of the two boys. . . .

'Try to eat your food, dad,' Megan said.

'Food,' he repeated woodenly.

'Yes, to finish an' wash all over before Llew 'an' Lias do come to see her.'

'All right, my gel.' But it was little he ate. Joe was put to write the letter to Moriah before washing all over, so that it would go that night to her. Llewelyn and Elias came washed all over hurriedly whilst Joe was out posting the letter. With them Megan discussed the funeral arrangements, for her father was like a tree struck by lightning in the arm-chair.

'Will you want a bit of a service in the house before she's carried out?' said Elias.

'Better, I s'pose,' said Megan, 'for in this Row they do always have a bit of a service in the house 'fore starting.'

'If you want it we'll have to let the preacher know,' said Llewelyn, 'for if we don't he may go straight on up to the Cefn in the brake to wait at the cemetery for us.'

So it was arranged for the preacher to come and conduct

a short service in the house, and it was also arranged for the chapel choir of which Megan and her two brothers, Llewelyn and Elias, were members of, it was arranged for the choir to sing outside the house. Were there to be cabs for the women of the family? that was the next question. 'We'll see,' said Megan.

A letter from Moriah to say that she was leaving Nottingham before the letter, perhaps, came the day before the funeral, and before dark she came right enough. Came dressed like a lady, and in a cab she came up to the house from the station. Telling the cabman to wait she ran out of the cab into Megan's arms. She cried a bit – but not much – when looking at her mother, coffined now. 'Looks lovely, don't she?' said Megan. 'Yes,' said Moriah, wiping her eyes with a little handkerchief as she went back into the living-room. Outside Will and Joe were talking to the cabman, whose horse and cab and he on the seat holding the whip and reins appeared to be more than the neighbours on their doorsteps could take their eyes off.

'Who came in that then?' one asked the other.

'Why, Moriah – an' wait till you see her, my gel.'

'This horse,' Will said to Joe and the cabman, 'this horse is nothing like so fine a horse as I drives down the pit. What do you call this horse?' he asked the cabman. 'Blackie,' said the cabby in broad English, for most of those controlling and working the district's horse transportation were Englishmen. 'Ask that lady how long she wants me to wait,' he added.

'What lady?' said Will.

'That lady in there,' said the cabby, pointing with his whip towards the door of the house.

Will laughed out loud. 'Why, that's our Moriah,' he said.

'I mean the lady I brought up from the station.'

'Ay, our Moriah. Moriah,' he called in, 'the man of the cab wants you for something.'

'Oh, I forgot about him,' said Moriah. Handing a half-

crown to Will she said: 'Give him this, and tell him he needn't wait, I'll walk back down to the Castle Hotel.'

'What do you want in the Castle Hotel?' said Megan as Will ran out.

'That's where I'm staying, left my things there on the way up.'

'You going to stay in the Castle Hotel?' said Megan incredulously.

'Of course, where else? And what are you looking like that at me for? Shon and I have stayed in many a bigger and better hotel than the Castle.'

'The Castle Hotel,' said Megan again. 'Humph, you'll have Shon in that new workhouse of ours before long at that rate.'

Moriah smiled and shook her head. 'Shon's got plenty of money.'

'He'll want it to keep you in hotels,' said Megan shortly as going to the door. 'Come on in, Will an' Joe, to go to bed.'

Will, who was up on the seat beside the cabby, said: 'I'm having a ride across the bridge as far as the main road to see how this horse goes.'

'You're not. Come down from there when I tell you.'

'Better get down,' said the cabby.

Grumbling Will jumped down, and as the cabby drove off he said to Megan: 'Here, our Megan, don't you order me about same as if I was our Joe.'

'Get in the house.'

As going in before her he muttered: 'For I won't have it, see - Oh, our Moriah, did Joe write in the letter about me being a haulier now?'

'I think he did.'

'Come on to your supper,' said Megan to the two boys.

'An' did Joe tell you the name of the horse I'm driving?'

'I said your supper - that's if you want any,' said Megan.

'Oh, all right,' said Will, flinging himself into a chair and reaching for a culph of bread to eat with a cut of

cheese, and to be washed down with a pint mug of tea without milk. After supper the two boys went upstairs to bed, leaving Megan downstairs with Moriah, and their father in the downstairs bedroom like a soldier on guard over a body lying-in-state.

'Will you have a bit to eat?' said Megan to Moriah.

'No, thank you, I shall have supper at the Castle Hotel. But I'll drink a cup of tea if I may.'

'You needn't bother to unless you want to – an' there's no call for all your fine talk either. How is Shon in that place where you left him?' she asked, pouring tea.

'Shon's very well – couldn't come with me because he's got a couple of rather unreliable fellows working for him just now. They are both finishing this week, and two new salesmen start on Monday.'

'I suppose he did marry you tidy after all.'

With an angry flush reddening her face Moriah said: 'I'm surprised at you, Megan. You know very well he did the week – that very week.'

'Ay, I know – but don't take any notice of me, Moriah fach, for I'm – I don't know. So Shon's doing well up that place, is he?'

'Fine, better than he was doing here in South Wales. He's got four running the planks for him, and one of them conducts sales when Shon wants a night off to take me to a theatre or a concert. Not having had to talk Welsh for such a long time, he's a proper Englishman now in his talk.'

'You talks different too.'

'Do you think so?'

'Yes, you talks a bit like that actress we heard that time in the Market Hall in that play *The Angel of Midnight*. Do you remember her?'

'I do, but I hope that I'm a little more genteel in my way of speaking than that woman was. I've been learning to speak properly, and to read and write, for quite a time now.'

'Night-school, is it? Same as Shon offered me.'

'Megan, are you trying to – '

'No, no, Moriah fach, I'm only saying, that's all. Is it to the night-school you goes to learn?'

'Certainly not. A woman who is head of a private school comes to me at the hotel, so does the Italian gentleman who is training my voice.'

'Pay for to read, write, speak, sing – it's the workhouse you'll put him in.'

'Don't be silly, Megan. Shon's got more money than – Guess how much money he gave me to come away with.'

'I don't want to know how much money he gave you,' Megan said as nasty as could be.

Moriah rose to her feet and began pulling over her hands what Megan had never yet owned. 'I'll say good night to dad.'

'Before leaving us for the Castle Hotel, for them who –'

Moriah was holding the curtain half-way across as saying good night to her father. Then she dropped the curtain to turn. 'Good night, Megan. I shall be up first thing to-morrow morning.'

Megan, who was banking the fire with small-coal, didn't turn to look, neither did she say anything. Moriah sighed and moved towards the door, where she stopped to ask: 'Will you walk down as far as the Castle Hotel with me?'

Megan, with the now empty coal-bucket held by the handle, moved close up to Moriah, to say quietly and sneeringly: 'Down to the hotel with you, my fine lady? No, send for your cab, yes, spend his money on cabs an' hotels an' –' But Moriah was gone, leaving Megan to hold the coal-bucket there in the doorway, from where Megan watched her go across the bridge towards the main road. She put the bucket down on the baili to run after her sister. 'Moriah fach, wait till I tell dad an' get my shawl. It's late, an' there'll be drunken men about the road, so I'm coming down as far with you.'

Moriah in her fine clothes waited far side the bridge till Megan with her shawl over her head and shoulders came

running. It was her mother's big shawl she had over her head and shoulders. Not the one her mother always called 'my turnover', but the big shawl with the deep fringe, her nursing-shawl, the one in which she had nursed when babies her eight children in turn, nursed them with the big deep-fringed shawl over the child and herself. Now that shawl – she not wanting it any more – over Megan's head and shoulders, where it seemed so natural and graceful from over her head, down in front over her bust, and down behind to below her waist. The shawl, her mother's big shawl.

Five minutes after closing-time, better known as 'stop-tap' and the main street like a fair at the beginning of the midnight hour. 'Stop-tap' was the time the beer-taps in the district's many public-houses stopped running into pints and quarts and other imperial measures. Eleven o'clock week-nights, an hour earlier on Sunday nights. Throughout the district it was a sort of moral unwritten law that all respectable people should be off the streets and in their beds before 'stop-tap'. Doors locked, respectable women and innocent children safe in bed long before 'stop-tap'.

Listen to some of the chapel-people, and you'd think it was hell that was let loose on to the streets after 'stop-tap', and for about an hour before. True, the last hour of each day's eighteen hours continuous drinking-time – from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. – was no time for any tidy person to be about, for the last hour before 'stop-tap' was the Bacchanalian hour with a vengeance, as the saying is. The hour which, except in cases of life or death, was left entirely at the disposal of publicans, policemen and drunkards. 'Drink up', it was – yes, and be quick about it, for time's going on. During the last hour beer was 'bolted', and the shreds of restraint left over from the drinking-day were swept away in the final flood of beer.

The main street was narrow and crowded, so narrow was the main street that between the Anchor public-house and

the barber shop other side of the road, the chap we called 'Dai Milgy' could jump in one jump from pavement to pavement. Many public-houses along the street, many of them so small that what is called the 'integument' was continually on the burst owing to the crowded state of the places during the hour before 'stop-tap', the hour during which men 'bolted' beer standing thick in passages and outside on the pavements.

Not that our district was any worse in this respect than other districts built around works and pits. Our district just happened to be the largest of its kind in the country, so perhaps that was why it seemed worse in this respect than smaller places of the kind.

'It might have been better had we gone down the Tramroad way,' said Moriah, following in the path Megan was clearing for her through the jungle of beer-stinking humanity.

'No, better this than the dark Tramroad,' said Megan. 'Keep close behind me – an' don't take any notice of what any of 'em says to you. This, bad as it is, is better than the Tramroad in the dark.' Doubtful, thought Moriah. However, they managed to reach the Castle Hotel without being insulted or in any way molested.

'Here you are then,' said Megan.

'Yes. Won't you come in for a minute?'

'Me go in there? No, not if I was made of money.' Pointing to the chapel across the road she said: 'Dad was standing there when the Scotch Highlanders was made to shoot at us from in there where you're going to sleep. Good night.'

There was a lot of talk in the Row about Moriah staying at the Castle Hotel, where she was being waited on hand and foot like a lady – but the neighbours soon had more than that to talk about. For the day after the funeral, and before Moriah started back to England where her husband the Cheap Jack was selling, a boy about Will's age came from the lawyer's office to say that Megan and

Moriah was wanted for something or other. When they went together to see him he surprised, more than surprised them, by informing them that the money old bopa Lloyd had left their mother buried the day before, was now their money. 'How much?' gasped Moriah. A little over five thousand pounds between 'em, he thought it would amount to. 'Do he mean us?' whispered Megan to Moriah. 'Who else?' said Moriah. There was some talk which Megan didn't quite understand, talk about 'the beneficiary now deceased', and a lot more that was beyond her. Any-way, it became clear at last that old bopa Lloyd in her will had left all her money 'to the daughter of my niece, Selina', and the daughter of the niece Selina was the mother Megan and Moriah had the day before followed to her grave in the Cefn; whilst others who expected much but were disappointed followed old bopa Lloyd to her grave in the Cefn an hour later of the same day. Now here was the lawyer telling them that the money was theirs being as their mother was dead. 'None for the boys, our brothers?' said Megan. The lawyer shook his head. The property, he went on to inform them, had been left by his client, the late Mrs. Lloyd, to Marged Ellis, for looking after her so well for such a long time.

'Well, well, well, well,' Megan was saying all the way home from the lawyer's. 'Whatever are we going to do with all that money?'

'I know what I'm going to do with mine,' said Moriah.

'Yes, an' I know what I'm going to do with some o' mine too - that's if we do have it in the long run. I'm having Joe out o' the pit to give him schoolin' for him to go behind the counter of a shop same as our mam wanted. But it's no good talking till we've got our hands on it first. Well, well, well, well - '

The first of the month of March, which was St. David's Day, passed off quietly. Plenty of singing, of course, for there were Eisteddfods held in the Drill Hall, Merthyr, and

one in the biggest chapel in Dowlais – which didn't have a hall of any sort yet, but the Oddfellows were all the time talking about building one. In addition to the two Eisteddfods there was a united Sunday-schools cantata held on St. David's night in the Temperance Hall, Merthyr, where there wasn't a word of English spoken or sung that night. Too much English, the chapel people said, had already been spoken from the stage by English players that some called 'actors'. Ay, and 'distinguished actor', it said on the play-bills. But actors and actresses distinguished or otherwise were 'old English' when all's said and done, said the Welsh natives.

English language heard spoken more and more, and places to speak the English but no Welsh being built all time. Three chapels the English had now in the place, they were for the English that worked. Then there were three English churches for them who carried the Prayer Book to read from. Mr. Gladstone had made what some called 'a new and improved system of elementary education', and now men they called 'truant officers' were going about the place driving Welsh children into schools where they never heard a word of their own language spoken. All the 'old English' all the time. Saying now that children would have to be left in schools to learn the 'old English' till they were twelve, and some of the women in the Row who referred to the 'truant officer' as that 'cheeky old sod' said to Megan: 'Keeping our children in school till they're twelve, if you please. Why don't they keep them there till they're married an' have done with it?' The School Board sent their old 'truant officers' to talk like policemen to people, and to threaten people that if their children were not in the British or St. David's School next morning it would be the police-court they'd have to appear at. Yes, and on certain days in the year the children of St David's School were marched next door to St. David's Church to sit an' listen to Church of England prayers out of a book. Welsh children belonging to the chapels having to listen

to things like that – ‘an’ if we don’t watch out they’ll make us, their fathers an’ mothers, go there as well to listen to the Church of England prayers out of a book,’ said the Welsh chapel people, who thought it was coming to something when –

Then there was the new Workhouse which had come to the place now. For years and years there had been talk of it, but the popular old Welsh ballad singer who sang the streets of Merthyr two or three nights each week all them years – he was singing the streets of Merthyr when many now married and with a houseful of children were children themselves. The old ballad singer he made his own songs, not write them down or anything, for he couldn’t write ‘em down if he wanted to. Made songs up in his head to come straight out of his mouth, and he must in all them years have made thousands of songs to sing in Welsh along the streets of Merthyr. And one of his songs was about the Workhouse, which he made up in his head to sing it when the talk about us having a Workhouse first started. No, he sang, we in Merthyr would never have any old Workhouse. Before such a thing as a Workhouse would come to insult us Welsh people, pigs would start talking, puddlers would be making golden sovereigns out of iron buttons, Cyfarthfa Castle would get up from where it was there above Cyfarthfa works and walk to some place out of our sight – but who ever heard of a big castle walking? Anyway, that and many other far stranger things the old Welsh ballad singer said would happen before we in Merthyr would have a Workhouse.

However, and without any of the strange happenings which the old Welsh ballad singer said would be bound to happen first, we had had the Workhouse up there on the Workhouse Tip for nearly a year now, and the strangest thing of all was that the old Welsh ballad singer who said it could never be was one of the first to be taken there, for like most ballad singers who sing the streets the world over, he had no home or family either. Now he was very old,

could hardly speak, let alone sing, up there in the Workhouse with the year 1870 cut into the stone above the entrance. No doubt some were proud of the Workhouse, and no doubt it was they who were proud of it had 1870 cut deep in the stone above the entrance for us people of Merthyr to remember the year it was given us.

'A lot of poor people who'll be better off now that we've got a Workhouse to put 'em in,' said the people who insisted on having 1870 cut into the stone above the entrance. Well, it is true that there were a few Crimean veterans about the place all the time begging pints o' beer an' pipefuls o' 'bacco - Dai Balaclava as we called him, was the worst of 'em. Sam Sebastopol was not much better. He took people off the pavement by their collars to show them the two cannon, one each side the entrance to St. David's Church, with 'Sebastopol' on them, and iron cannon-balls stuck fast in their mouths. Sam Sebastopol would stand the one or two people he had marched off the pavement in front of the cannon with which he said he had managed to reduce the fortress of Sebastopol, and then he would go on to ask if that was not worth a pint, or, failing that, a share of a quart o' beer. Beer was only fourpence a quart, and some days the Crimean veterans had a lot of it before laying about anywhere. 'Better off they'll be in the Workhouse,' said people who didn't like to see men lying about drunk like these veterans did. They were not so old as all that, but they called themselves veterans and, once a veteran, always a veteran, perhaps that's what they thought. Anyway, they helped to stock the new Workhouse, and when they were allowed out into the town for a day occasionally they - well, celebrated.

It was rather a pity they built the new Workhouse where they did, right up there where many of our leading tradesmen were building themselves fine houses in Thomastown. Tradesmen who had for long lived behind and above their shops in the main street, had to build themselves houses in which to live more comfortably now that they had done so

well. So many of them now had fine houses up in Thomas-town where they had two stories in the front and – with what some called 'the underground kitchen' – three stories in the back. From those houses up on the rise they went downhill into town each morning to business, and it wasn't very nice for them to have a Workhouse to the right of 'em. Anyway, there it was, in one of the most exclusive residential districts of the town, with Dai Balaclava as gate-keeper when he was behaving himself tidy. When in disgrace for abusing the privilege of the weekly outing in town by getting helplessly drunk, he was put to saw wood and chop it and make bundles of firewood with the others in the yard at the back, and Sam Sebastopol, or the old ballad singer, or one of the other men took his place at the gate in front. The firewood made into bundles in the yard behind the Workhouse was sold to the people of the town that wanted firewood. The female inmates of the new Workhouse didn't have to saw and chop firewood, but they were allowed out occasionally to see their friends, from whom they begged a penn'orth o' snuff or an ounce o' 'bacco – for some of the women in the Workhouse they smoked pipes like men. And it was English most of 'em spoke in the Workhouse, for them who had been in the Crimean War had lost most o' their Welsh there, and now they spoke more English than Welsh.

That's going a long way round to come back to the united Sunday-schools' cantata in the Temperance Hall on the evening of St. David's Day, when it was all in Welsh, and not a word of English could you hear. All-Welsh performance by an all-Welsh cast and chorus, all the gels dressed in white, the boys and the conductor himself dressed in black, the conductor's wife at the piano in half-mourning, for she had lost her father, who had for many years been a deacon at Tabernacle Chapel, a little time before. So that was how the children of the Sunday-schools of our Welsh chapels celebrated with song our St. David's Day on the first of the month.

But there were no Eisteddfods or cantatas on the seventeenth of the month, St. Patrick's Day for the Irish of the place. Not much singing that day, but plenty of old fighting. Then who started it? Some say that the Irish did, others say the Welsh. Anyway, the English they kept out of it, and the Jews and Scots they went about their business as pawnbrokers and credit-drapers, leaving the Welsh and Irish to fight if they wanted to. The Welsh and Irish were left by the English, Scots and Jews, to do most of the hard manual labour – and the hard fighting as well. Left them to sing ‘Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau’ or ‘The Wearin’ of the Green’, whichever they fancied. Welsh who lived in Colliers’ Rows, and Irish who lived in Paddies’ Rows, Welsh who worked in pits, and Irish who worked in ironworks, Welsh and Irish who had slaved to make millions sterling for English masters unto the third and fourth generation, now at each other’s throats. ‘Them houses they’re living in,’ said the man as he pointed them out to the Commissioner, ‘are not fit for pigs.’ That was exaggeration, slight, but still exaggeration.

The funny thing was that the two peoples who worked hardest and lived under the worst conditions, when they exploded, it was into each other’s faces, so to speak. The Irish and Welsh vented their pent-up rage against things in general on each other, as they did on this St. Patrick’s Day again. The hauliers had this day stopped one of the Dowlais pits by saying that this day again was ‘a good day on which to change a sovereign’, and now, about middle-day, all in their pit-clothes, they were working for beer ‘on strap’, or ‘on trust’, or ‘credit’, as others would say, through the public-houses of Dowlais. By this time the hauliers had been joined by about half a hundred colliers, who with the hauliers were rushing landlord after landlord for as much beer ‘on strap’ as he could be rushed for.

They were by this time half-drunk, ‘nasty-drunk’, most of them, and the landlords of the public-houses in the High Street of Dowlais were not proving themselves as accom-

modating as was anticipated. Here in the High Street, which was little more than a lane through the Dowlais works, the Welsh hauliers and colliers on the spree were coming across numbers of the Irish from the works across the road in the public-houses celebrating the day of St. Patrick. In the Forge Hammer public-house the half-drunk Welsh chaps began throwing their weight about offensively. One of them took the empty quart the landlord had refused to fill again 'on strap', took it across to where some Irish, about a dozen of them, were drinking together. There were amongst them a couple of what were called 'newly-come-overs', the name given to the new blood just across from Ireland. It was the shoulder of one of these young fellows – a fine, well-built young man he was – the haulier from Pengarnddu tapped, and when the young Irishman turned about smiling the Welshman scowled at him and said: 'Well, which o' you flaming Paddies is going to fill this quart for us. Come on, quick about it. The price of a quart for a start, I said.'

Mike Murphy, who was talking to Tom Donovan, turned just as the young man from Ireland the day before come was about to fork out for beer for the Welshman stood there bouncing. Mike roared as he rose to his feet: 'Kape yer money in yer pocket – '

'Hoy,' shouted the landlord from behind the bar as the Welsh chap living in Pengarnddu smashed the empty quart measure on Mike Murphy's head. In the twinkling of an eye the place was transformed from a place of refreshment and good cheer into what some would call a 'bear-garden', others 'a cockpit', in which the Irish and Welsh 'marked' each other. The inner door half-glass they fought through out on to the street, one couple after the other, and when they were all out the landlord rushed to lock and bolt the outer door.

'Not so bad as I thought,' he said, viewing the breakages. 'Come an' see,' said his wife from where she was stood on a chair to look out through the window shuttered outside

half the way up. ‘There’s hundreds at it now – some women an’ all. Where are the policemen?’

‘Where they always are, I expect,’ said her husband as he straightened things a bit. ‘Hiding somewhere till the trouble’s over. They might come presently if so be they hear that the Welsh are getting the worst of it. Whilst the Irish are getting the worst of it the bobbies’ll stay where they are out o’ sight.’

The landlord he only said what many said about our policemen keeping out of sight until they heard that the Welsh were having the worst of the fights with the Irish, for all our policemen were Welsh – or as good as Welsh. Yet it is wrong to say that they favoured the Welsh by keeping clear whilst they were having the best of it, only to run in force to interfere when the Irish had the upper hand. An odd one of our policemen might be of that way of thinking, but to say that all of them –

‘Oh,’ cried the landlord’s wife from where she was stood on a chair looking through the window out on to High Street, ‘that big Irishwoman from Horse Street have come now with a rolling-pin to brain people with – Oh, she’ve downed one – come an’ see.’

‘I’ve seen plenty o’ fights out there,’ said her husband. ‘Come down from there before they see you and throw something to smash the window.’

‘Yes, p’raps I’d better,’ said his wife.

The battle-front was quickly being lengthened, and along the top of the Dowlais works wall, which forms the right side of Dowlais’s High Street as you walk uphill into the place, there are perched hundreds of spectators who have left their jobs for a minute to watch the fight in progress. ‘Come down from that wall an’ get back to your work,’ bosses inside the works are shouting. ‘You’ll be docked half a shift if you don’t.’ But the men and boys on the wall wouldn’t miss such a fight for a long shift’s wages. On the wall-coping perched they remain, Welsh and Irish, shouting encouragement to the fighters in the street below.

Wherever have they all come from? There were less than thirty all told in the public-house where the fight started, now there are hundreds banging away at each other along the High Street – not a policeman to be seen anywhere. From a half-dozen little streets uphill off the High Street, Irish and Welsh come running for a share of the fighting. The young Irish newly-come-over is shoulder to shoulder fighting at the side of Mike Murphy, here from Ireland since the hungry forties. Welshman after Welshman they floor, these two, until one of the Welsh spectators on the wall lets fly with one of the two large pieces of clinker he had armed himself with before mounting the wall. The piece of clinker meant for either Mike or his young comrade-in-arms, hits the young man to cut him over the right eye, and now the blood is flowing down his face. The Irish spectators on the wall-coping cry, ‘You dirty spalpeen’, as they walk like tight-rope walkers to get at the Welshman who threw the clinker. So the fight is now elevated, as you might say, above the street to the long-wall’s coping-stones, where balancing battlers crest the wall with violent motion.

On the hard road of the main street below Mike Murphy, the battered veteran of many such fights, is covering the dazed and blinded by blood young man so lately come over. Along the narrow High Street all shops and houses and public-houses now shuttered, locked, bolted and barred. None too soon either, for the battle-front has now lengthened to the top of the road leading down to Gellifaelog. From the top of a man-made mountain of works refuse a voice is heard crying to the Welsh of Gellifaelog to rally. ‘Boys of Gellifaelog, come, for the old Irish are beating us from Dowlais Top down to Penydarren,’ and the cry for support is in Welsh. Some say that the meaning of Dowlais in English is ‘two voices’, which might be so, but this day there are two voices heard, anyway. Like the echo of the cry for support in the Welsh tongue, a wild cry in English from the mouth of the young Irishman stood high

on the mountain of furnace refuse above the left of the road. Naked to the waist he stands, for the shirt has been ripped off him in the fight to hang like an apron down about his legs. With the shirt now an apron he wipes his face clear of blood again before shouting from on high down along the backs to Company Row where the Irish are crowded. A wild racial call twice repeated before from below in the slummiest part of Penydarren an answering cry. Then the young Irishman, the shirt now a ragged apron about his legs billowing, runs down the side of the mountain of furnace refuse to take his place in the Irish ranks again. ‘They’re on the way,’ he shouts as he flings himself into the fight. ‘They’re coming,’ shouts the Welshman in Welsh as he runs back into the fight from the Gelli-faelog side.

Led by young Tim Murphy, the Irish reinforcements rush yelling up from Penydarren. Dan Delaney, a sober, decent man who is a bit of a boss on the Dowlais works railbank, now home nursing an injured hand, sees them running armed with all sorts of sticks, sees them running from where he lives on the side of the main road near the Rose and Crown public-house. ‘What’s the trouble, Tim?’ he calls out. Young Tim Murphy points with the stick he is carrying up towards Dowlais, and as he runs cries: ‘They’re at it again in Dowlais beyond.’ Dan rushes from before his house to the middle of the road to try to stop the running, yelling Irish with his one good hand held up. ‘Now, for the love o’ God – ’ He is sent sprawling, holding his injured hand up to save it as he falls, and the bandaged hand held up looks as though it were a headless rag doll in a man’s hand. Peg, his wife, rushes from the doorstep to help him to his feet. ‘Oh, your poor hand – come inside, me Danny, and I’ll lock the door. Oh, the poor hand that Dr. Flanagan said you mustn’t – ’ ‘Me hand’s all right – but look at them running, the poor fools. . . .’ He starts running after them. ‘Come back, Danny,’ cries his wife, but he doesn’t even look back. So she legs it as fast as she

can after him again. Her Dan, the tidiest, soberest Irishman of all the thousands – an’ his poor hand in a sling. A peaceful man, her Dan, and well she knew what was likely to happen to a peacemaker. Well respected he was by both Welsh and Irish, and no blackguard of either the Irish or Welsh would lift a hand to her Dan in cold blood. But when the fighting was through an’ through, up an’ down, there was no knowing – an’ he with his poor hand like it was.

Dai Phillips, better known as ‘Dai Bando’, was leading the Welsh reinforcements up from Gellifaelog. Dai had one shoulder higher than the other. Some said that it was a deformity, others that it was the way he had come to hold his shoulder through trying to guide the quoits he pitched in matches as they went through the air. Anyway, his right shoulder he always carried level with his right ear. He was called ‘Dai Bando’ because he was the district’s most dangerous Bando player. When playing Bando the man between Dai and the wooden Bando ball was likely to have his shin or shins broken by a blow from Dai’s club. When injured men complained all they got from Dai was: ‘Then why didn’t you get out of the flaming way?’ Dai’s favourite indoor amusement was spitting in Irishmen’s beer, which is a dirty trick, but it was Dai’s, and there you are. Caused many a row, started many a fight – and is it any wonder when you come to think of it? There would be an Irishman, as tidy an’ quiet as you please, with his pipe in his mouth, an’ his pint o’ beer only just tasted on the bar in front of him. Dai, after a wink to the other Welshmen present, would, with his right shoulder as high as ever, steal up behind the Irishman to spit thick ‘bacco-juice into the man’s beer. Then there was a laugh. Some of the victims of Dai’s little joke had spirit enough to throw the polluted beer into Dai’s face, and then the band played, as the saying is. But most of them took the hint and cleared out, for Dai Bando certainly could fight. Perhaps he’ll have his bellyful of fighting to-day, for here he comes with

his Bando stick held aloft, in front of the Welsh gang from Gellifaelog. They stop as they see young Tim Murphy leading the Penydarren Irishmen up the road to the junction of the two roads at which Dai stands waiting with his gang.

'Ah, here come the Penydarren Paddies, boys,' cries Dai in Welsh. 'Just in time you're here, you tater-pickers,' he cried now in English. 'Me son of Tim Murphy, the iron-ore tosser. Where's your n——h'orse of a father? — but you'll do for now. Into 'em you go.'

Silent the Irish stood as Dai Bando's gang rushed towards them. Tim Murphy's hand closed tight over the stick he was holding, and he loosened his left leg for a flying kick into the fork of the first of those coming, and the first was Dai Bando, who knew as well as Tim did that the fight was to be one quite outside all civilised rules. 'Take that, you —'

Breathless Dan Delaney came shouting: 'Tim, do you hear me, Tim, come away, come away out o' that.' He scrambled up to the top of a low wall to shout sense if he could into the Irish, but it was a waste of breath, that he soon could see. Another band of Welsh youths coming from the Gellifaelog side swept him off the wall as they plunged into the fight. Peg was there to pick Dan up. 'There, you've hurt your hand,' she said as he stood holding it with the other as weakening stabs of pain along his arm from the wrist to the elbow made pale his face with pain. 'Come home with me out o' this,' cried his wife, interposing her body between him and a group fighting on the retreat. Dan allowed his wife to lead him down the road towards home. About fifty yards away from where the long battle-front ended he turned about to stand looking sadly. "Tis no use you worry yourself, Dan," said Peg his wife, 'for 'tis the way it do be. We Irish have everywhere to fight for a footing.'

'But not the way they're fighting back there,' he groaned. 'Almighty God, is it black savages we are?'

"Tis worse than black savages they do be treating our people. How's your poor hand now, Dan?" she said, walking him on.

"Tis not me hand that's troubling me."

'Sure I know what's troubling you most, but you mustn't let it, Dan. We'll go into our house, an' we'll lock our door -'

'No, Peg, our door's ^{sta}~~sta~~ open. They'll be fighting past it an' down into the ^{streets}~~streets~~ of Merthyr before night, an' there will be many left ^{bleedin'}~~bleedin'~~ in the gutters. Our door stays open for 'em, be they Welsh or Irish, God help 'em, the door stays open.'

It stayed open, and before night many a one was glad to go into Dan Delaney's house for a little attention. The fight petered out shortly after nightfall on the Pontmorlais Square, where a strong force of police prevented the Quarry Row and Caedraw Irish of Merthyr from joining in to keep the fight going. Dr. Flanagan was until late that night busy in his little surgery bandaging and stitching, and one of the last to be attended to by him was Dai Bando, who was dragged from where she had felled him by the Irish woman from Horse Street. His broken head was hanging limp, his mouth wide open, his eyes half open and glassy. 'I don't think he's dead,' said the woman from Horse Street as she laid him down for inspection by Dr. Flanagan.

'No, he's far from dead,' said the doctor, after a look at him.

'I'm glad o' that, for I wouldn't like to be hung for the likes o' him,' said the woman, standing with her blood-stained rolling-pin under her arm.

'Is he,' said the young doctor, not knowing the woman yet, 'is he your husband?'

'God forbid,' said the woman. 'All the same, he's a good fighter for a Welshman, an' I'll see him on his feet towards his home before I leave him.'

CHAPTER IX

CHAPELS AND CHOIRS

ON the Sunday following the fight between the Irish and Welsh, it was hard to believe that such a thing could have taken place where so many chapel people as were now seen on their way to chapels lived. Megan was on the right of her section of fours, which she was taking to Zoar Chapel. She was on the right, Joe, in one of the two new suits she had bought him this year again, to the left of her. She had for some time now been paying five guineas a quarter for him to attend the school in the street near the police station that was named Albert after the Queen's husband. Joe being nearly fourteen when she took him out of the pit to give him schooling was too old to go back to the day-school, so she paid all that money, twelve guineas a year, for him to go where there was only about a dozen other boys, much younger than him, under the old man who lived in the big house bottom end of Albert Street, where Joe was getting on famous. The old man was teaching Joe reading, writing and sums, and Megan, in the evenings, was learning to read with Joe, and to write a bit as well. She was also attending a tonic sol-fa class a man was conducting in the vestry of Zoar Chapel once a week on Wednesday evenings. Already she could read the music of the choruses of the Messiah, which she knew without music before. Every day she grew to feel more proud of Joe, and more sure of herself as well. She was a-willing to pay for Will to go to night-school, but Will wanted to know what good a night-school was to a haulier underground. 'You never know,' she said. Anyway Will, who was all the time talking over the wall to the gel next

door, whose name was Susan, said he didn't want to go to any night-school. 'That's that old gel next door,' said Megan, who, now that she had the bit o' money, wanted to educate all the members of her household. 'You don't like Susan?' said Will. 'Not a lot,' said Megan. 'Too half-soaked for my liking. Come-day, go-day, she is.' 'She's all right,' Will insisted. 'Then why don't she come to chapel with us?' Megan wanted to know. 'Because she's got to sit with her mother same as you had to sit with our mam when she was bad,' said Will in Susan's defence. 'So she tried to make you stay home from chapel as well,' said Megan. 'That's a lie; for she don't,' said Will. 'Shush,' said their father, to the left of Will. 'Yes, shut up, there's a good boy,' said Megan.

On Pontmorlais Square many people turning right for Bethesda and Tabernacle Chapels, but they were few compared to the many who went straight on down to the other chapels. Sober-looking and soberly-dressed they crowded the narrow street, these people on their way to the chapels. In silence they walked most of them, and the few who disturbed the silence by speaking did not raise their voices above loud-whisper level. Nobody laughed, a frightened smile was the most some of the young people exchanged as parting right and left into their chapels, chapels so close to each other as the Pontmorlais and Zoar Chapels. Each public-house passed on the way to chapel drew audible sighs from the elderly amongst the chapel people, who sighed their disapproval audibly for the benefit of the young people whom they regarded as being still open to temptation. Publicans opened up their premises on Sunday evenings furtively, for they, after all, were not altogether without shame.

Before six o'clock, for nobody dared be late with deacons with their eyes on the doors of the chapels, there were, roughly, about ten thousand people crowded into the eighteen chapels of Merthyr. In square and half-circular 'big seats' of the eighteen chapels, sat the elders, the deacons,

about a dozen in each chapel. These had never been known to smile, but that was not a sign of lack of feeling. But all feeling was by them expressed in groans and sighs. All chapels crowded before six o'clock this evening; and the preachers are with eyes modestly to the ground going up into their pulpits. Hymns, prayers, the reading of the Word, collections – then the sermons.

In Beulah Chapel in Castle Street on the Glebeland, the Rev. Watcyn Jones was reading: 'Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.' Lifting his eyes from the Bible he stood looking out on the congregation. Beulah Chapel was crowded, people seated on the steps which were the aisles between the blocks of seats up in the gallery. 'I'll read that again,' said the Rev. Watcyn Jones.

The congregation sat silent on hard and narrow seats. In the 'big seat' immediately below the pulpit sat a baker's dozen of Beulah's deacons, ten of whom were bearded men. The other three wore only substantial moustaches, they were the youngest of the deacons. From the 'big seat' back to the wall, and the two doors through which the people entered, row after row of seats facing the pulpit. Three blocks of wooden seats divided by two stone-flagged aisles. Along the aisles and clear of them, pillars of iron to support the gallery of the building. The gallery was the shape of a door-frame when horizontal on the ground before the carpenter stands it up into place. Most of the seating on the floor of the chapel, and about half the seating accommodation on the floor of the chapel was under the gallery. Those seated right and left of the gallery had to sit with the upper part of their bodies on the twist a bit to keep their eyes on the preacher in his pulpit. When singing they stood up, then it was the other way they looked at the leader of the singing, who with his tuning-fork was stood centre of the row front of the gallery. Beulah is one of the few chapels which is still holding out against music to accompany the singing of the hymns. Most of the other

chapels have by now got either harmoniums or organs, but the deacons of Beulah – the bearded majority – and the old-fashioned leader of the singing are still contemptuous of the musical accompaniment which some of Beulah's young people tried to say would make the singing there better. The three youngest deacons were of the same opinion as the young people of the chapel, thought it time there was an organ to help the singing, but that was still the minority view. The elderly majority of deacons had fought against the use of gas to light the place, but eventually they agreed to its being tried. It was tried and found wanting, for it burnt noisily and disturbed the significant silences of the pauses between the sentences of the sermons. So Beulah went back to the hanging oil-lamps which the widow-woman looking after the chapel kept so nice.

'I'll read that again,' said the Rev. Watcyn Jones. 'Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.' One of the deacons shouted: 'Yes, thanks to Him.' Closing the Bible with a bang the Rev. Watcyn Jones cried: 'Yes, but no thanks to us. No thanks to us is what I said.' He sighed. 'After what happened in our midst this last week I am almost ashamed to stand here in God's presence to-night. There are those who have smiled when they said that the Welsh and Irish have been at it again. The Welsh – and the Irish. "No more strangers and foreigners – " There are in this town of Merthyr eighteen Nonconformist chapels – another dozen or so at Dowlais. And yet this fighting and drinking. . . .'

He was right about there being eighteen chapels in Merthyr, and forgot no doubt he did to say how many of the chapels was Welsh and how many English. Fifteen of our chapels were Welsh, and three only were English. Some of our deacons were not willing for the English chapels to be counted in with our Welsh chapels, but Watcyn Jones, the preacher of Beulah, was not like that.

He reminded his deacons of David Rees, of Llanelly, who every Sunday morning for six years threw his chapel open to the English to come in after the service in Welsh ended, when he would preach in English for the English who had no place to go to. And David Rees he helped to build the first chapel the English had in that district.

The ironmasters who were English themselves went to the Church of England, and when they sent for English workmen to come down to Wales with their families, they no doubt thought that what was good enough for them was good enough for the English workmen too. But the English workmen after they came down to South Wales would not, if you crowned them, go inside the Church of England churches in Merthyr. Like in Llanelly they would hang about with their families to hear from one of the chapel preachers a word in English after he had finished talking in Welsh to his Welsh flock. Anyway, they had three chapels of their own now, and another in the building, so that would be four chapels in which the English would be spoken and sung.

It is funny how the chapels are built and rebuilt in a place like Merthyr where the coal is brought up and the iron is made. Many of the Welsh chapels were built about the middle of the eighteenth century, to be rebuilt in the middle of the nineteenth. First they were small, and shaped like barns, but when rebuilt to look like they are now they are fine buildings, but their situation is not so good as it might be. They are either jammed between the Tramroad and the main road, or between the Morlais Brook and the main road – the lower chapels between the Taff River and the main road. A couple like Zion on the Twyn, and Tabernacle over on the Brecon Road, are up and back out of the way a bit, but most of them are stuck along the Tramroad, or on the banks of the river or brook.

‘—decency, a state of decency, that is what we have yet to bring about,’ the Rev. Watcyn Jones was saying. ‘We from our chapels must create a moral atmosphere in which

such scenes as were witnessed here last week will be unthinkable. . . .'

No doubt the chapels did exercise a powerful influence for good throughout the district, where, but for the chapels, the people as a whole would have no doubt long ago been made brutish by the working and living conditions. Preachers of chapels had their work cut out to save people, and their sermons had to be worded and delivered in a way that would alarm the unconverted, frighten them into being good. For most of the people being practically children all their lives it was not much use their preachers reason with them, for the very good reason that there was no reason for the preachers to reason with. Only the emotions, that's all, so the appeal had to be an emotional one. Preachers adapted themselves to the circumstances, and the material they had to work on for the glory of God. Their sermons they chanted soulfully to awake congregations deadened by weeks of crushing labour in pits and iron-works; and the women-folk deadened by living conditions which invited cholera, tuberculosis, smallpox, and other deadly complaints too numerous to mention.

'We and the Irish,' cried the Rev. Watcyn Jones, 'spring from the same root. Fellow-slaves, that's what we are. Then why fight? You, my friends, in the pits and works, must go on asking that question. "Blessed are the peacemakers. . . ." What a world we are living in. But it is getting better, my friends, people are growing wiser - '

'Yes, thank God,' cried the youngest of his deacons.

The preacher went on to refer to Mr. Gladstone as a godly man who was making it impossible for little children to be driven to work before they could walk or talk properly. The coming generation, he said, would, with the education they were now getting, be all the more able to deal with the evils under which their fathers and their fathers' fathers had suffered. The evil of drink in particular -

No doubt that was the greatest evil. The drink which robbed men of what little sense they had left after crushing

labour in pits and works. The drink was what the preachers had to fight all the time, not fight against it themselves, for none of the preachers touched, had ever touched a drop of drink, but they had to fight hard to win the souls of the so many addicted to it. Thousands an' thousands of drunkards, more drunkards than there were sober chapel people. Sober and decent the preachers wanted all men to be, and they worked hard to make everybody sober and decent. Twice at least they preached on Sundays, and mid-week they conducted the prayer-meeting at which members both old and young prayed in turn. The preachers they married and buried people, and went about doing good. They played their parts in the revivals which some people sneered at, they became fools – in the eyes of some – for God's sake. Theirs was no easy job. Preaching salvation was a full-time job in such a district. Yet some of the preachers burnt midnight oil over the words of a hymn, a poem, an address, an occasional article. A few of them, the Rev. Watcyn Jones in particular, came out into the open as politicians in support of such Liberals as Henry Richard – Now, from the pulpit, he refers to Henry Richard, the senior member of parliament for the borough.

'Religious freedom, political freedom – that we have won. Restraint, moral restraint, we must now as chapels exercise to prevent a recurrence of what happened in this district last week. The public-houses turn men out full of drink on to the streets to fight each other. Well, we must from our chapels send out on to the streets men to spread the spirit of peace. Blessed are – '

'Humph, Moriah'll do,' said Megan after Joe had read Moriah's letter, the long words an' all, right through for her. She took the letter out of Joe's hand to spell 'Ac-ad-em-y' before going on to say: 'I should know how to spell that by now. She writes nearly as good as you do, Joe bach.'

'She writes quite as good as I do.'

'What'll she do next, I wonder?' said Megan as she put the letter in its envelope on the mantelpiece. 'Academy, indeed – but, fair play for her, she told me that day the lawyer told her about the bit o' money, what she was going to do with it. All the same, if I was Shon, she'd be looking after her home.'

'But she hasn't got a home,' said Joe.

'No proper home, it's true. But there, it's their business.'

It was Saturday evening, and Megan was on the point of going to shop a bit when Joe had come late for tea. He had been for a walk to Pontsarn with the old man who ran the little private school Joe was attending, the old man who was paying special attention to Joe. As soon as Joe had returned from his walk with his master, Megan had handed him Moriah's letter to read. 'I've made the most of it out,' she said, 'but there's a few of them old long words of hers I can't make out.'

Moriah had for over a year been at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she was having her voice trained and she was paying for her training out of the money old bopa Lloyd had left her same as she had left money to Megan. The man who had been training her voice up to the time she had the money left, had managed to secure her admission as a student at the Academy of Music in London, where – according to her own reports – she was getting on famous.

'Perhaps you'll see her when you go up to sing with the big choir,' Joe said.

'I'm not sure that I'm going yet,' said Megan. 'Now, do you want any more to eat before I put this food away?'

'No, thank you. Where's our Will?'

'Gone out walking with that old gel from next door.'

'And dad?'

'Gone up as far as your brother Llewelyn's.'

'Here, you're not going down the street shopping with that old shawl over your head?'

'To be sure I am. Don't I always go shopping this way.'
'I know, but — Why can't you put your best clothes and hat on?'

'Because it's not Sunday. This is a good shawl, isn't it?'
'Yes, the shawl's — But only old women go to town with shawls over their heads nowadays.'

'All the women in this Row goes with shawls over their heads to fetch their few things. And, remember, I'm not so young.'

Joe regarded her critically. 'Too young for that shawl. You needn't think that I'm going with you with that shawl over your head.'

'Who's asking you to come with me?'

Joe sulked.

'You stay to learn from them books, my boy, that's enough for you to do,' said Megan.

'Will you go to London with the Cor Mawr with that old shawl over your head?' said Joe as she was going.

'You mind your own business, Joe bach. The bit o' schoolin' is swelling you. Better watch out.' Off she went with the shawl over her head, and the big basket with the cover on her arm. The cover of the basket had a slot in it to allow it to go down over the handle to cover whatever might be in the basket. Time I made my mind up about going to London, she was thinking as going over the bridge towards the main street. Either to go or tell 'em I'm not going so as they can get somebody in my place.

Having the best untrained soprano voice in the district, she had been recommended by the man with whom she and others learnt tonic sol-fa in the Zoar Vestry on Wednesday evenings, by him she had been recommended to Lewis Morgan. Lewis Morgan was the Merthyr conductor who was preparing the Merthyr section of the South Wales Choral Union that was to sing for Wales and for the one thousand pounds prize at the Crystal Palace under Caradog, who was considered the best conductor in Wales. Caradog wanted the cream of the singers from

every place in South Wales to make a choir five hundred strong to sing at the Crystal Palace. Then he'd show the English critics. . . .

Lewis Morgan was preparing the Merthyr section for Caradog's 'Cor Mawr', which in English means 'Big Choir'. When Megan went with the man from Zoar Chapel to where Lewis Morgan was rehearsing the Merthyr section, Lewis Morgan was delighted with Megan's voice. 'Can she read music?' he asked the man from Zoar. 'Tonic sol-fa, that's all.' 'That's plenty,' said Lewis Morgan, giving Megan copies of the test pieces and telling her to find a place to stand by there with the sopranos. Three pieces they had to learn. One piece by a man whose name Megan pronounced same as she did when saying 'bach' in Welsh to Joe. The other two pieces were by men with longer names, which Joe had to consult his master about the pronunciation of, before he in turn gave Beethoven and Mendelssohn correctly to Megan to pronounce. It was funny to note the difference between words sung and words spoken by Megan. Words had to be sung correctly, and she sang all the words correctly, but she spoke anyhow, as all the women in the Row did.

Now she had learnt the three pieces to be sung by the Cor Mawr at the Crystal Palace, and still she hadn't made up her mind about going. She had said 'yes' to Lewis Morgan when he asked her. There were two things which now made her doubtful. Leaving her dad and the two boys to manage best they could for a few days was one, then the expense was the other. She wanted to go, yet was afraid of the journey to London, and of London itself when she got there. She had never gone anywhere with what she called 'the old train'. Pity now that she had told Lewis Morgan that she would go. It would be nice to be a member of the big choir, which under Caradog was going to beat the English choir. She felt quite certain that if she did go it would be to return as a member of the winning choir. If so be that she went, Moriah, who by this time

no doubt knew her way about London, however big it was, would be there to see that she didn't lose her way or anything. So, being as she had said 'yes' to Lewis Morgan, p'raps she had better go not to make any old bother at the last minute. P'raps Llew's wife, Norah, would come down to look to her father an' the two boys one day, an' 'Lias's wife, Miriam, look to 'em the next. That gel next door that Will was walking out with, if she wasn't so half-soaked, could very well look to 'em for a couple o' days or three, whichever it would be. Anyway, she'd see.

She stopped when seeing a crowd of young people being formed into a procession on Pontmorlais Square. She remembered the leader of the singing at Zoar asking the young people all to stay for an after-meeting, after the ordinary Sunday evening service last Sunday. So this was what he wanted. Wanted the young people to turn out again to try and sing the town sober. 'They can leave it alone when they like,' murmured Megan, who knew that for over thirty years, yes, since when Moses Davies had first started the Temperance singing-parades which Rosser Beynon led after old Moses died, and ever since then the young people of the chapels had from time to time put on Rechabites and Good Templar badges and medals and regalia to sing through the drunken town on Saturday nights. Still men drank as much as ever. 'So what good them try,' said Megan.

About – well, anything from a hundred to two hundred young people now formed up ready to start singing through the narrow crowded street. Men with pints and quarts full of beer held up, looking out through the windows of the Owen Glyndwr public-house at the young people so foolish as to think that their singing could turn a man from his drop o' drink. One man came out through one of the entrances to the Owen Glyndwr public-house with a quart filled with beer held out. 'Here, drink up,' he shouted at the earnest young man marshalling the procession. 'Go on in to your drunken butties, you old scamp,' muttered Megan

whose sympathy for what it was worth the temperance ide had.

The earnest young man pointed across at the Owen Glyndwr public-house, and immediately all those in the procession he had marshalled turned right to sing a broad-side at that crowded drinking-place before moving off. They sang, sang until the Pontmorlais Square was ringing again, the temperance hymns.

‘Mae llais o ddirfawr hedd
 Yn galw ar eich hol;
 Myn dirwest hardd ei gwedd
 Eich derbyn yn ei chol;
 O dewch, O dewch, mae’n hyfryd hwyl,
 O dewch i gyd i gadw gwyl.’

Only in Welsh was the appeal sung by roughly two hundred good voices stressing the note of appeal. English-speaking drunkards would have to wait until the English chapels sent out a choir to sing them sober. The temperance hymn now being sung in Welsh they would find it difficult to translate, if and when it was translated it would go something like this:

‘The voice of perfect peace
 Is loudly calling thee,
 To join the Temperance Cause
 And make the whole world free.
 Oh, come, oh, come, without delay,
 Oh, come and keep the festal day.’

Anyway, there was no demand for a translation from the English minority of those crowding the public-houses on this pay-Saturday night again. Had there been a demand for an English version of this and other temperance hymns, it is doubtful whether the demand would have been met. There were more Welsh drunkards than the Welsh singers had hymns to save.

Having given those in the Owen Glyndwr public-house something to think about, the procession moved down the street about a hundred yards, to sing broadsides at the first

of the many couples of public-houses to be attacked in couples before the night was out. The Morlais Castle and The Tiger public-houses, both of which are heaving, are now under the singers' fire. People can't move through the street, and those in a hurry have to push on to go up the lane by The Tiger and home the Tramroad way.

'I'r lan, i'r lan a'r faner fawr
 Mae dirwest wedi dod;
 O lys y nef fe ddaeth i lawr
 Cawn chwareu clychau clod,'

is the song they are singing now. In English this is nearly it:

'Lift high, lift high its banner bright
 And drunkards leave the cells;
 From Heavenly courts above,
 Shall ring the Temperance bells.'

Whether it was the singing, or the cause, is more than Megan found time to decide before, from where she stood on the pavement, she added her clear soprano to the voices of those in the procession which was holding everything – except drinking – up. For the next two hours Megan, keeping to the pavement all the time, lent her voice to the cause. She fell out after The Star public-house had been done, for she had her shopping to do.

'On our way to London to show the English the way to sing,' was the reply those of the Merthyr section, on their way down through the town to the railway station, gave to those who wanted to know where they were off to. Old Dick Hughes, who since he had had a leg off in the works was always standing on crutches about the place, shouted after the departing singers to warn them to look after their voices. 'For that's all the English have left us,' leaning forward on his crutches to shout after 'em. 'An' if only they could sell our voices by the truck-load same as they have our iron an' coal, we'd have all been as dumb as that dumb barber long ago.'

The Welsh singers on their way to London laughed, for old Dick Hughes on his crutches was always shouting after people. Either shouting bitter warnings, or plaintive appeals for beer, of which too much often taken robbed him of the support his crutches afforded. He was as bitter as if he had been the only man in the district on crutches, instead of which there were scores short of legs on crutches, and scores more short of arms. Then there were scores of bent and twisted men crawling about, sightless men robbed of sight by blasting accidents feeling their way about or being led about, so Dick Hughes with his one leg off high up needn't have been so bitter. 'The English bosses have had my leg,' he was always saying around the public-houses. A nuisance he was at times to landlords of public-houses, who said better if he and old Jinny, his wife, were taken to the new Workhouse out of the way. Better off they'd be there. But old Dick Hughes wouldn't let 'em take him there. There was talk about stopping his parish relief to make him go where he and the old woman his wife would – some said – be better off.

The singers on their way to London to sing for Merthyr in the Cor Mawr soon forgot old Dick Hughes croaking on crutches. Joe had come down to the station to see Megan off – there was some fuss if you like. Railway station full of people to 'send' the singers as far as the station anyway. Some who were not going to sing were going all the way to London with the singers to hear them sing. They could afford it, for those supporters of the singers were most of 'em bosses' wives or daughters. But most of those crowding the railway station had only come to 'send' the singers. Joe, now that he had had schooling, said: 'I'll see you off at the station'; but most Merthyr people, not having had the schooling Joe was still having, said: 'We'll come to send you as far as the station.' The word 'send' to those who hadn't had schooling, was more useful and expressive, they found, than either the new 'see you off' or the old 'good-bye'. For 'send' meant 'walking a bit o' the way with you',

meant 'good-bye for now then', or 'good-bye for ever', and some of the older people stretched its meaning to include the dead by saying: 'The least we can do is to send him as far as the Cefn', where his grave was yawning for him, as the saying is. Mothers went to 'send' their children part of the way to school, and when one saw a neighbour with her shawl over her head and asked questions, one learnt that she was going to 'send' someone as far as the corner, the Pontmorlais Square, the Drill Hall, the Market Square, where the brakes waited to take people all over the district, or to the railway station to 'the old trains' which took people all over the world. That is why there are so many in the railway station to 'send' these singers who are going all the way to London which, if what's in the papers is true, must be an awful place. The plays that came to Merthyr, *The Streets of London* for one, *Lost in London* for another, and that play that came last to Merthyr was worse than them other two. *Great City* it was called, and if that's what London is like, then you'd —

'They'll be all right, Mrs. Davies, for there's Welsh people who've lived for years in the place meeting us and looking after us whilst we're there.'

Mrs. Davies sighed as she looked on her two daughters and said: 'Well, we'll hope for the best — but it's little I'll sleep till they're back in Merthyr again.'

'Don't you worry, we'll be all right, mam.'

Like Bedlam the platform was with parents shouting advice and warnings off the platform at those hanging out of the windows of the train as it grunted its way out of the station. 'There, they're gone, God help 'em,' sighed Mrs. Davies, whose two gels were contraltos like their mother had been when she was singing under Rosser Beynon, better known as Asaph Glan Taf.

Oh, what a journey it was for them going from Merthyr to sing in London in Caradog's Cor Mawr. They had to get out of the train they was in and get into another at Cardiff, where the singers from all the other South Wales

places had to change trains as well. For this great choir of the South Wales Choral Union that was going to London to show the English the way to sing, was made up of sections from many places in South Wales. Each valley of this land of valleys and hills sent its section to sing in London under Caradog, and when they all came together they were more like five hundred than four. Then there were them from all the places who were paying for themselves to go to London, not to sing themselves, but to listen to the Cor Mawr, which in English is 'Great Choir', singing under Caradog, by some called 'The great Caradog'.

It was the supporters that did most of the talking on the way up, for the singers were reserving their voices for the singing they had to do in London. Long before they got there Megan was, so she said to the gel sitting next her, 'sick of the old train'. Would Moriah, she wondered, be at the London railway station to meet her? Joe had, in the letter, sent to tell Moriah the time Lewis Morgan told Megan they from Merthyr would reach London. But owing to waiting for them from other places at Cardiff, the old train would not now reach London the time Lewis Morgan said. So perhaps Moriah would, tired of waiting, have gone out of the railway station there, and back to wherever it was she was staying.

But no, Moriah was there dressed like a lady and to talk like a lady in what Megan called 'the high English' since Joe had started to talk that way as well. And standing with Moriah was Shon – Megan didn't know him at first in his grand clothes – smiling a welcome. 'Well, well, well,' was all Megan could say as she shook hands with him. Laughed he did, and said he had suspended business where he had been selling somewhere in England, to come to London to see her. Grand he said she was looking. 'It's Moriah's looking grand,' said Megan, wiping with her handkerchief where Moriah in a theatrical way had kissed her. She, never having kissed anybody in her life, forgot to kiss Moriah back.

'Come along, come along,' the fussy little secretary of the Merthyr section was crying. 'This way the Merthyr section.'

'You'd better tell him that Megan will stay with us, Shon,' said Moriah.

'No, I've got to stop same place as the others,' said Megan.

'You're staying with us,' said Shon, going after the secretary of the Merthyr section who, after Shon had explained, said: 'No, I'm responsible for the Merthyr section – for it's I'll have to answer for them to their parents. There's place ready for 'em to stay with tidy people,' he said, looking suspiciously at Shon. 'Come to stand by here with these other gels, Miss Davies,' he shouted at Megan.

'I'll have to go,' said Megan to Moriah.

'Indeed you won't,' said Moriah. 'I'll explain.' She spoke to the secretary, who again said: 'No. She's to go to the place where she's to stay with the other gels from Merthyr. We must have 'em all together ready for the final practice.'

'Yes, don't make old bother, Moriah,' said Megan.

'I'm her sister, and I'm here studying at the Royal Academy of Music,' said Moriah to the secretary. 'During the time my sister's up here I want her with me at my hotel. My husband and I will see that she turns up for your rehearsals, and at the Crystal Palace. So will you please –'

'I tell you that you're not having her to stay with you after me finding place for her to stay with the other gels,' the secretary said. 'If Lewis Morgan himself likes to let you have her, then on him the blame.'

'Where is Mr. Lewis Morgan?' said Moriah.

The secretary pointed to one of two men in conversation. 'Explain to him, Shon,' said Moriah, taking Megan's arm to keep her there whilst Shon explained. A lot of explaining had to be done, and assurances given, before Lewis Morgan, the leader of the Merthyr section, allowed the one he thought was his best soprano to go out of his sight with her sister and brother-in-law. 'I suppose she is your

sister?' said Lewis Morgan to Megan, as he looked Moriah dressed so grand up and down. 'To be sure she's my sister, Mr. Morgan,' said Moriah. 'And you'd rather stay with her than with the other girls?' 'I'd rather stay with the other gels than make any old bother, Mr. Morgan.' 'No bother as long as you'll be safe, and there to sing with the others when Caradog wants you.' 'I'll be ready to sing when I'm wanted, Mr. Morgan.'

'Such fuss,' muttered Moriah, holding fast to Megan's arm, and all the men and girls of the Merthyr section standing with their mouths open looking at her dressed so grand. 'Did you hear her saying that she's studying singing at the Royal Academy of Music?' one of the girls was whispering to another.

'All right,' said Lewis Morgan at last, 'go you to stay with your sister.'

'This way now then you others of the Merthyr section,' cried the secretary, leading the way off the platform.

'This way,' said Shon to Megan, taking her other arm. Between Shon and Moriah she walked, calling 'good-bye for now then', to the men and girls following the Merthyr section's secretary like a drove of timid sheep. For off that platform was the London they had all heard so much about. London, the place about which there were so many plays with most villainous villains in 'em – and some, if not all the villainy they had heard the place was notorious for must be true. So two by two in fear and trembling – also thrilled a little – they followed their secretary and leader off the platform.

Shon was holding the door of a cab open for Megan and Moriah to get in. 'Is it as far as that then?' said Megan, hesitating. 'Get in,' said Moriah. 'Yes, in you go,' said Shon smiling. In the cab they went to an hotel where they had food before going to 'the opera', as Moriah called it. Fine singing, Moriah told Megan she would hear. So it was, but as it was in Italian, Megan was not a lot the wiser, but she liked the singing all the same. Between the

acts, at the end of which the tenor and the soprano were clapped an' clapped, Moriah sighed and said that she wished she was a soprano too. For sopranos and tenors, she said, got most of the applause for their trills and top notes held out. Megan was comparing the theatre she was in with the Temperance and Drill Halls in Merthyr, and the little wooden theatre on the Tramroad there as well. 'You could put our little theatre on the Tramroad in Merthyr on that stage, and then have room to spare,' she said. 'This would be a fine place for you to sell in, Shon,' she added. 'But where would you get planks to reach all the way from that stage to where all these people are sitting?' Moriah said 'Shush.'

After the singing was over they went in a cab back to the hotel, where they had food again before going upstairs to bed. Now was the first time for Megan to see where she was to sleep by herself. A bed as big as the four-poster old bopa Lloyd had died in looking small in the middle of a big room, which Megan, used to rooms in which beds were tight to the walls both sides, said was like a field. 'I'm not going to sleep in here by myself,' she said, looking childishly at Moriah after looking round the room. 'Don't be silly,' said Moriah. 'I tell you I'm not, I couldn't - no, I'm not, I tell you.' Moriah sighed as looking at Shon, who stood in the doorway smiling. 'You sleep in here with her,' said Shon to Moriah. 'Yes, plenty room, plenty room for us all in that bed,' said Megan, not thinking what she was saying. 'No, not all of us,' said Shon.

Moriah slept with her that night, and when the candle was out and they were lying cwtched together in the dark, it was like it used to be in the nights when they were working long days together in the brickyard.

Moriah and Shon came to hear the Cor Mawr from South Wales sing in the National Music Competitions at the Crystal Palace, where, as Megan was sure all time, they won hands down, as the saying is. John Curwen, the man who made the tonic sol-fa for people to sing to, was there,

and what he said about us was: 'We begin to understand the spirit of self-sacrifice and determination which enabled a choir of working-people to spend four thousand five hundred pounds; which made a thousand or more of their friends to take a long journey to witness the victory — No one grudges them their reward, least of all the tonic sol-faists.' And a lot more he said about us.

There was a grand concert afterwards, and Eos Morlais, the famous tenor from our place — for Dowlais is practically Merthyr — came from somewhere in London to the Crystal Palace to sing 'Annwyl yw Gwalia fy Ngwlad', that is to say, 'Dear is my Country of Wales to Me'. And didn't he sing it. The applause after he had finished singing was as loud and as long as when the board of adjudicators announced that 'The South Wales Choral Union is victorious'. Inspired by that victory, Eos Morlais, which in the English means 'nightingale of Morlais', sang as he had never sung before about how dear to us all was our native country. Up there, in the Crystal Palace of London, we all sang, and Eos Morlais sang, of Wales, and for Wales. We in the choir, the great choir, or as we say in Welsh, 'Cor Mawr', sang under Caradog, our greatest conductor. Yes, we showed the English how to sing.

CHAPTER X

STRIKES AND SAILINGS

THE big strike of '73 made a big hole in the bit o' money that was left to be shared between Megan and Moriah by old bopa Lloyd. Moriah she was spending her share of the money on herself – well, on her voice, having it trained an' things. It cost money up there in London all time. Still, she could always call upon Shon, who had plenty. Megan had nobody to call upon, and a three months' strike to carry the family through; then there was Joe's schooling to pay for whilst his father and Will his brother were not earning a penny.

The bosses they wanted to lower the colliers' wages again, and Will, who was one of Halliday's men now, when Megan began to talk about it being foolish to strike, asked her if she could ever remember the bosses wanting to raise the colliers' wages. She couldn't remember. 'For they never have, that's why,' said Will. 'My bit o' money won't last long at this rate,' Megan said. 'Let it last as long as it will,' said Will, off out to a meeting at which Halliday was to speak. Will was proud to call himself 'one of Halliday's men'.

What he meant by that was that he was a member of the Union which Halliday, the Englishman, had come down from England to form, and now Will was one of a gang of hauliers going about trying to make others join the Union. Megan stood on the doorstep watching Will go swaggeringly across the bridge on his way to hear the Englishman speak in the old Penydarren works, which hundreds of men were making for. 'Look at the big man,' murmured Megan, looking after Will going with his clay pipe in his mouth.

On the strength of eleven years' work underground, Will at nineteen years of age considered himself as good a man as any. Wearing one o' them new bell-bottomed trousers which was so tight at the knees, yet flapped wide as a woman's skirt where they ended around his elastic-side walking-out boots. His legs looked longer than they actually were owing to his cutaway coat being so short, or 'crop' as he said, over the hips. The ends of his sailors'-knotted silk muffler were blowing free over his left shoulder, and the big poke of the cap he wore rakishly almost robbed him of the sight of his right eye. He spat ostentatiously through broken teeth without removing from his mouth the clay pipe he was smoking, his two thumbs were stuck between the waist of his trousers and the leather waistbelt without which he said he felt naked. He wore it over his evening trousers and his pit trousers. In the pit the waistbelt was essential to hold in position his haulier's 'peechin teen', which, being strong leather, saved his buttocks from bruising and skinning by lifting and screwing loaded trams of coal.

Easy tell our Will's a haulier by the bouncy way he walks, Megan thought as watching him. All the hauliers walked in that same 'bouncy' way, that 'to hell with the bosses' way. It was mostly hauliers that were helping that Halliday from England to make the Union he had formed strong, and it was the hauliers who called themselves 'Halliday's men'. Megan had never seen the man Halliday, but goodness only knows her brother Will talked enough about the man, who no sooner than he arrived in South Wales from England was shouting 'no surrender' at meetings all over the place. True, thought Megan, the men's money's small enough, goodness knows, but still it would be better than no money at all like now *after* letting the bosses take off what they wanted to take off. Bad times, and now the strike again, were making women they didn't know what to do, and driving tidy men by the hundreds weekly out of their own country to America. All who could

scrape the money to go were going, even when it meant leaving their families behind to shift best they could till they could be sent the money to follow their men-folk to where people said things were so good in Pennsylvania. Mr. Bruce, who had been in Parliament for Merthyr till Henry Richard was put there instead of him, he, Mr. Bruce, stood up to talk in Merthyr, not about Parliament now, but about the best workmen of the place all going all the time to Pennsylvania in America. The end of it would be that America would have all our best ironworkers and colliers — that's if we didn't mind out. But none of the hauliers went off to America, 'no, stay here and fight to make things as good here as there,' the hauliers in their bouncy way said. The colliers who were not so much for fighting as the hauliers, they went off to America if they had the money. Megan had seen many a one with box and carpet-bag, and followed by his family and friends — all going to 'send' him as far as the railway station — passing down the hard road which she could see from her doorstep.

There was so much to be seen from her doorstep. Before her eyes for a start all the children of the Row who were having to feel the pinch more now that their fathers were not working. The children of the Row on their way to school, coming home from school, playing about in front of the Row till dark. All day the children's voices, crawling children crying, walking children talking, running children shouting, their fathers at the meeting or in the public-house, their mothers on the doorsteps unsmiling. One at a time they came, the women of the Row, to Megan, for the lend of a shilling. Hadn't she been left a fortune by old bopa Lloyd? 'My bit o' money,' Megan said; but the neighbours they called it 'a fortune'. Not that they went the quicker to her because she had it. It hurt them to go when they did, and but for the children Megan would not have been bothered. 'Oh, no, starve myself first' — the proud fools. But when the children . . . Then a woman

had to pocket her pride. A shilling at a time they borrowed from Megan, a woman could do a lot with a shilling of ready money in her hand when there wasn't much ready money about. Scraps, split-peas, a ham-bone, a bit o' flour for baking. . . .

Megan from her doorstep could see old Marged Ellis coming up the Row towards her, with her black oilcloth shopping bag in which she carried her fat rent accounts book, and the rent money collected. But Megan could tell by her face that it was little rent she had collected to-day again. 'Hullo, Marged Ellis, how are you to-day?'

'Not a penny of rent to-day again - that's how I am,' said Marged Ellis, stopping to cetch her breath. Megan didn't say any more for a bit, for she could see the old woman was boiling over with rage an' things. She stood there on Megan's bit o' baili glaring about her. In her black skirt going green, her long cape black and beaded, and the rag she called her 'best bonnet' on her head. In one hand a big umbrella shut fast, in her other hand the oilcloth shopping bag - the shiny outside beginning to peel to show the canvas lining of the bag - with the book to put the rents received down on, and what bit of money she carried to change gold and silver tendered for rent. She stood breathing noisily in through her mouth, and out through her nose. On elastic-sided boots too big for her feet, but not for her corns, she stood. Each time she breathed in her mouth opened wide, to shut with a snap as she breathed out through her nose. The snuff thick in her moustache, and her eyes like shiny marbles the boys played with, nearly jumping out of her head. 'No, not a penny of rent to-day again. I'll have the bum-bailiff to turn 'em out on to the road every one. You wait.'

'Come in an' sit down a minute, Marged Ellis.'

'No - couldn't sit. All them houses - not a penny of rent to-day again.'

'Come in for me to make you a cup o' tea.'

Marged Ellis liked a cup o' tea with Megan. On what

she called 'rent day', she called at Megan's on the way home, and over a cup of tea she complained about the tenants of the houses old bopa Lloyd had left her. So Megan by this time knew nearly as much about the tenants as Marged Ellis, their present landlord, did.

'Can't expect rent from women when the men are not working, Marged Ellis,' said Megan, putting the cup o' tea.

'The men ought to be working,' snapped Marged Ellis. 'And that old scamp from England who is stopping them to work ought to be put in jail. P'raps they think I don't have to pay rates on my houses.'

'Drink your tea now.'

'The lawyer when he was collecting the rents for your bopa Lloyd, God help her, took none of this nonsense – but he took nearly half the rent for collecting. Now they're taking advantage of me, a poor old woman with only the bit o' rent to live on.'

'Yes, drink your tea now.' Tears for rent uncollected ran down into the tea in the cup the old woman drank out of, and Megan she looked at the old woman who had plenty as she well knew. She wasn't, Megan remembered, as bad as this for money when she was housekeeper-companion to old bopa Lloyd. Then she used to joke and laugh a bit, but now she did nothing but complain. Getting older, no doubt, that was why. It was the lawyer had the houses on his mind then, now she had them on her mind all time.

Less crotchety after two cups of tea, the old woman left for the big old house on the rise in which she lived alone, having a little gel she paid a shilling for to clean up and down on Fridays and Saturdays. Like a black-beetle with head well up she looked to Megan by the time she reached the hard road. Yes, poor old Marged was getting older, everybody getting older. Sophie Morris now alone in the little house down the Tramroad getting to look old thinking of her boy gone to the Cefn all time. Yes, 'since he's gone to the Cefn I've gone I don't care,' Sophie had said when

Megan went to sit with her a bit after chapel on the Sunday evening.

Sophie, like all the other women, spoke of her boy as having 'gone to the Cefn'. It was less painful to say that, than to say that he was dead and buried in the Cefn. All the people of the place spoke of their dead as having 'gone to the Cefn', and a stranger would think that they were referring to someone who had just gone for a bit of a walk 'to the Cefn'. That's where Sophie's heart was now, anyway. In the brickyard she was no longer the life of the place, the guardian and protectress of little gels starting to fill the places of them who left to get married. Now she left the gels to fend for themselves, to stand up for themselves. All Sophie looked to was the clay-crushing and clay-mixing pan, and she didn't look to that as well as she used to. 'Hoy, come on, Sophie, move yourself,' the boss's son shouting all time, and Sophie with no back-answers. Her heart in the Cefn, and she growing older in the brickyard.

Yes, and what about me too, thought Megan, going in off her doorstep to look in the glass at herself. I'm not getting any younger, thirty the year after next - 'What do she want again?' she said aloud to her reflection in the glass, as Susan from next door called over the wall between the two houses. The lend of a shilling was what Susan wanted until -

'I know, until p'raps never,' said Megan crossly, as her hand went through the slit in her skirt to the pocket inside where her purse was. Too half-soaked she thought the gel was. Her mother had 'gone to the Cefn', and she, Susan, stayed home to look to her father and the house instead of going to earn a bit in one o' the brickyards. 'My bit o' money will soon be gone at this rate,' muttered Megan, as she went back into the house after giving another shilling to her next door again. Couldn't think what Will could see in such a half-soaked gel as that. Harmless enough, never a bad word for anybody, but half-soaked all the

same. Many like her though, plenty half-soaked women about.

For the rest of that day Megan was feeling low, and she was glad when it was time to go to bed out o' the way of everything and everybody. She had given her father and the two boys their suppers, and they had gone upstairs to their beds, and she was banking the fire with damp small coal when who should rise the latch and walk in but Llewelyn and Elias, her two married brothers. 'Hullo, what do you two want this time o' night? Dad and the two boys have just this minute gone up to bed.'

'Never mind,' said Elias, seating himself on the three-legged stool. 'It's you we've come to talk to.'

'Yes,' said Llewelyn, 'it's you we want to talk to, Megan fach.' He sat in the arm-chair, his father's arm-chair.

'Talk you,' said Megan, taking the coal-bucket out to the coal-cwtch.

'Sit down by there,' said Llewelyn when she returned. He pointed to a chair. 'Megan, neither me nor 'Lias have ever asked you for a penny, have we?'

'Have I been saying that you have?'

'No, no, it's I am saying now, now that me an' 'Lias – that's if we can get the money – have settled to go to America.'

'America?'

He nodded his head downwards, as Elias from the three-legged stool below nodded his head upwards. 'That's if we can get the money to go from somewhere.'

'Oh,' said Megan, nodding her head. 'So you've come to me?'

The brothers nodded their heads.

'Why do everybody come to me? I'd like to know. Why didn't you two instead of coming to me write to ask our Moriah for lend of money to go to America? She had as much left her as I did.'

The brothers shook their heads. 'No,' Llewelyn said,

'our Moriah's married to Shon the Cheap Jack, and we wouldn't like him to think -'

'Quite right,' said Megan, 'we don't want him or anybody outside the family to think any of us are beggars. But America, the other end of the old world. What's the good you go there?'

'For it's better there than here,' said Elias. 'No strikes out there. Joseph Parry was telling us before he went back that there've been no strikes where he is in Danville since he went there a boy in 'fifty-four. Look how he've got on out there.'

'In the pits is he out there?' said Megan.

'No,' said Llewelyn, 'in the ironworks he was till he came back here to London to learn the music. Now he's teaching music an' singing out there.'

'Oh, that Joseph Parry is it you mean? Him that was adjudicating in the Temperance Hall Eisteddfod?'

The brothers nodded their heads, the drooping ends of their long moustaches in motion. 'Joseph Parry worked a boy when we worked as boys in Roblin's Pit,' said Elias.

'And the three of us sang alto when boys in Rosser Beynon's choir,' said Llewelyn.

'Well, couldn't he lend you the money to go out there to him?' said Megan.

'Come, 'Lias,' said Llewelyn, rising out of the arm-chair.

'Sit where you are, 'Lias,' said Megan. 'An' you needn't be so sharp, Llew,' she added, pushing him back into the arm-chair. 'Llew' bach,' she had often when a child heard her mother say to the man now in the arm-chair. He had started working underground before Megan was born, so had Elias. Now they were both looking to her to help them over the sea to America. Early made men they both were when, on Saturdays, they each carried a twin-sister apiece in their arms over the bridge and out on to the main road where the shops were. Out of their pocket-money they bought her and Moriah things - 'Is there pits as well as ironworks in America where you want to go to?'

'Ay, plenty pits,' said Elias.

Megan thought for a minute. 'How about Norah - an' Miriam with you, 'Lias - an' your children the two of you?'

Norah and her children, Llewelyn explained, would go to live with Norah's parents, Dan and Peg Delaney, until such time as he could send them the money to follow him out to America.

'Miriam an' the children will manage till I can send for them,' said Elias. 'She's got the few shillings for the cleansing of Horeb Chapel in Penydarren for one thing, an' the promise of a couple of days' washing a week with them big people living in Penydarren House. Miriam won't trouble the parish.'

'No fear she shan't,' said Megan.

'Then you'll lend us the money to go?' said Llewelyn.

'Did you think I wouldn't?' she said sharply.

'I told him that you would,' said Elias.

'Who told you that I would?' she said, now turning on him. The brothers sat silent. 'I'm spending fine. Giving to everybody an' keeping Joe in that school all time - an' now Will's talking about marrying that gel next door, an' it's me they're looking to. But never mind about that. Come you with me for me to sign my hand in the morning at that bank for what will take you tidy where you want to go - though God only knows why I'm helping the two of you to go where I'll never set eyes on you over the sea. But don't tell to anybody that I'm lending you the money to go, for p'raps - Never mind. There, that's how it is. Going an' going. . . .'

'Yes indeed,' said Elias, putting his hand to the three-legged stool to prevent it from tipping over as he took his weight off it. For they all knew how rickety the old three-legged stool was by now. Their mother's father, who was no carpenter, but an iron puddler, had made it. It was the stool their mother had always when patching pit-clothes sat on. Nice and low it was for her by the fire. On it with one hand inside a heavy and hard pit-boot they

could see her now applying shoe-oil to soften the hard pit-boot. And the three of them thought they could see her there on the three-legged stool, now that Elias had stood up off it and away from it.

'Thank you, Megan fach,' said Llewelyn, patting her shoulder.

'Never mind thanking me,' she said, still looking down on the stool. 'What's old money for? Keep your mouths shut, that's all.'

'Never fear,' murmured Llewelyn, as though to the three-legged stool.

'Time for us to go,' Elias said, looking at the stool.

'They're gone,' said Megan to the three-legged stool after her brothers had gone, quietly closing the door behind them.

'They're gone,' was what she said five weeks later after the train bearing them away had steamed out of Merthyr railway station. Twenty-three left Merthyr that morning for Liverpool, where the good ship *City of Berlin* was waiting to take them across the Atlantic to the New World. About two hundred friends and relations came to 'send' the twenty-three emigrants as far as the railway station. Those who had come to 'send' Llewelyn and Elias were few compared to the number who had come to 'send' other members of the party of emigrants. Only about a score on the platform to wave good-bye to Llew and 'Lias. Norah, her children, and her parents with whom she and her children were to live until Llew would send for them. That was seven. Miriam and her children makes eleven, Megan, her father, Will and Joe, that's sev - no, fifteen. The preacher of Zoar Chapel makes sixteen - though he was 'sending' two others besides Llew and 'Lias. Then Susan from next door to Megan's came as far as the station looking half-soaked standing close to Will all time. So with her and the preacher of Zoar Chapel - neither of whom belonged to the family in any way - there were only seventeen all told to 'send' Llew and 'Lias.

But it looked as though all the Irish living in Company Row, Penydarren, had come to send young Tim Murphy, mad Mike Murphy's son, who was going to join an uncle doing well in Chicago. Tim's sister, Eileen, Sam's widow, now married again, and to an Irishman this time, had come over from where she lived with her second husband in Tredegar, to 'send' her brother - and to get disgustingly drunk as well. Megan told her that she ought to be ashamed of herself, and she told Megan to mind her own business. 'Then go away from me,' said Megan, turning away from her. Tim Murphy was as sober as a judge talking to the priest who had come to 'send' him, but Tim's father, Mike, was chock full of lachrymatory beer. The mother, Bridget, as sober as the son she was losing. Friends and relations by the score, nine out of every ten reeling around Tim, his mother, and the priest with the tolerant smile sticking to his face. Pointing towards Megan Eileen was reeling around saying: 'Turns her back on me that was a good wife to her dead brother for as long as he was spared. Now she . . .'

Twenty-two of the party leaving were men, the other member of the party being a woman who was going to join her husband in West Virginia - wherever that is. She didn't know, but as her husband was meeting the boat there was nothing to worry about. Ever so many had come to 'send' her, for she was a singer who had sung with Megan in Caradog's Cor Mawr, and the many who had come to 'send' her now sang the saddest songs, all the good-bye-for-ever songs and hymns in Welsh that they could think of. Enough to break the poor woman's heart it was. For all those who were on the platform were convinced - except in the cases of those due to follow their husbands and fathers later - that they were seeing the last of those leaving. There were two sorts of 'good-bye' in Merthyr at the time, one 'good-bye for now then', meaning a short period of separation, and good-bye for ever. The latter was the good-bye now being said and sung with tears. For America

was at the other end of the world, and once a person went there they were — except the one lucky one per thousand — as good as dead.

'Remember now — '

'Mind now — '

'May God watch — '

'May the Mother o' God who knows what poor mothers — '

'Stand clear there — '

'I will — '

'Never fear — '

'I shall be all right — you look after yourself and the children — '

'Wave your hand to daddy — '

'There, there — '

'There, they're gone,' said Megan.

'I'm going back to the office,' said Joe.

'Yes, go you, Joe bach,' said Megan. Another disappointment he had proved. After paying for schoolin' for him she had found a place for him behind the counter of one of William Harris's grocer shops, she even bought the stuff to make him white coats and aprons. Then he turned round and said that he would not go behind any counter of any shop — 'I'd rather go back down the pit with dad.' So he had found himself a place in an auctioneer's office, where he was working for nothing till he learnt what there was to learn about the business to command payment. Still, it was a start, and it was a job he could do well-dressed with a pencil in his waistcoat pocket, and another behind his ear. As she watched him, tall like a gentleman going, she thanked God silently for the bit o' money that had enabled her to make what she thought was a gentleman of Joe, her 'baby' now that their mother was gone. Difference between him an' that Will, standing there with that muffer making him look like a tinker-gipsy, and that gel from next door looking so half-soaked by his side.

'Come on now, good gels,' she said to Norah and Miriam, both of whom were still stood looking at the bend in the

railway line around which the train had long gone out of sight. Out of sight it had gone. 'Come on up to our house for a cup o' tea.' Norah said that she and her children were going up to her parents' house. 'All right, come you an' the children then, Miriam, before that drunken Eileen Murphy comes botherin' again,' said Megan. 'Come on, dad,' she said to her father, who was talking to Dan Delaney. 'He's coming with us up to Penydarren for a cup o' tea an' a talk,' said Dan Delaney. 'Take him you,' said Megan, moving off the platform. 'Do him good to have an hour with Dan Delaney,' she said over her shoulder to Miriam. 'He's breaking, your father,' said Miriam. 'He's breaking hisself,' said Megan, 'worse luck.' His blank meekness she was beginning to find was trying. All the time saying only, 'Yes, my gel,' or 'You know best, my gel.'

They were back out on the street now, Miriam with her baby in the shawl, and her other children one each side her. Behind them slouched Will an' Susan from next door, holding hands like children on the main street in broad daylight. 'Them two behind drives me mad,' said Megan. 'What's the matter with 'em?' said Miriam indifferently. 'Everything,' said Megan. 'Like a rodney he dresses. As much difference between him an' my Joe as there is between chalk and cheese.' She said 'my Joe' when speaking of the youngest brother, but 'that Will' she said when speaking of her other brother.

The Company Row Irish now came around the corner from the railway station to fill about a hundred yards of pavement along the High Street, on the right-hand side going up. Singing and crying and shouting. The priest he waved a hand as he left them to cross the road to hurry away over the Glebeland out of sight. 'Quick before that lot behind cetch up with us,' said Megan. 'If our poor old Sam could see that Eileen now he'd turn in - What are you crying for now again?'

Miriam without thinking put out her tongue to catch a falling tear. 'My 'Lias,' she said.

"Lias will be all right, gel. Yes, he'll look after number one. Give me the baby a bit.'

The baby was passed over. Off the main road and across the bridge to Megan's house. 'Take the baby whilst I make a nice cup o' tea,' said Megan, as Will and Susan from next door stood outside the door. 'No, I won't come in,' Susan was saying to Will. 'Yes, come in, don't stand there,' said Megan.

They all sat down to a cup o' tea an' a bit to eat, after which Miriam, giving the baby the breast, said: 'Pity Moriah couldn't come to "send" her brothers that she might never see again.'

'"Never see again" – don't talk so soft,' said Megan. 'She'd have come if it wasn't that she was sitting exams in that Academy. No good her leave the exams go after paying all the money she have to have what they teach there. But she sent to Shon in a letter, for him to go from where he's selling in England, to Liverpool to put Llew' an' Lias safe on the ship.'

'My 'Lias can put hisself safe on the ship,' said Miriam.

'No doubt, but Shon can put him safer, for Shon have been all over the place, and he knows more about the world than 'Lias an' Llew' put together.'

'I wonder when he'll be coming back to Merthyr to sell like he used to?' said Will, getting up to light his pipe.

'Goodness knows,' said Megan.

'P'raps never,' said Miriam, spiteful a little. 'Now that your Moriah is making herself such a fine lady, p'raps she won't let him come back here to sell like he used to.'

'If Shon wants to come, then he'll come,' said Megan. 'But he'd be a fool to come to where it is strikes all time from the places in England where he's doing so well.'

'He won't have to go to America to get a living,' said Miriam. 'He got plenty. Your Moriah's lucky. Time you thought about getting married, isn't it, Megan?' Megan didn't bother to answer, for she could see that

Miriam was not herself. Now that you've got this bit o' money you didn't ought to have much trouble finding a man.'

Megan flushed up. 'I could have found a man if I wanted to before ever I had the bit o' money.'

'No doubt,' said Miriam, but it sounded like 'no fear'.

'Yes, no doubt at all. But I had mam then, and I've had dad and Joe and this one here since to look to,' she said, pointing to Will. 'Never mind that. Any more tea, any of you?'

'No, thank you for asking,' said Susan, rising. 'I'll have to go and look to my dad too.' Will followed her out.

'Funny your Moriah haven't had children,' said Miriam, hooking her bodice after the baby had had suck.

'She's young yet,' said Megan. 'Let me have the baby a minute now.'

'No, we're going now,' said Miriam. 'Thank you for a lovely cup o' tea.'

'Don't bother, you come often as you like. What are you crying again for?'

'My 'Lias,' bawled Miriam. 'A widow bewitched I'll be for years for sure, an' p'raps a widow for good.'

'Name o' God - There, you've made them all cry now. Be quiet, good children. Sit down, Miriam, good gel, an' have another cup o' tea. 'Lias will be all right, I tell you. There, drink that. Have a piece o' bopa's cake,' she said, as she cut more cake for the children.

'An' me - talking - so nasty to you, after all you've done,' snivelled Miriam.

'What's the matter?' said Will, coming back in.

'What can you see the matter?' Megan asked him. He pointed with his pipe at Miriam in the chair crying tears over her baby's head.

'I expect the train my 'Lias is in is gone past Pontypridd, now,' snivelled Miriam.

To dry her up Megan said: 'So is Llew', but I'm sure Norah is not still crying.'

'She've got her father an' mother; I've got nobody only the children,' sobbed Miriam.

'That's true, God help you,' said Megan. 'But try not to cry any more all the same.' Megan had a job with her that night. After the first letter from Elias in Scranton in America, Miriam was much more cheerful than she had been. Happy she was looking forward to the day when she would be going to join her 'Lias.

The strike was no sooner over, and the men back at work again, before Will and his sort started talking about running Halliday for parliament. Will said that he wanted Halliday in parliament before he got married to Susan. 'If you wait for Halliday to go to parliament for Merthyr instead of Henry Richard,' said Megan, 'then you'll never be married.' 'You wait,' said Will. Wait she did, and a lot of old noise and fighting there was. Megan got the election campaign news from the gel who carried milk around from Cae-Mari-Dwn Farm, who got it from the cowman at the farm. As far as she could gather from what the milk gel retailed with her milk, Megan understood that Mr. Fothergill stood for prosperity, Henry Richard for peace, and Halliday for goodness knows what altogether. Will, who was all for Halliday, said that he was going to get the men more money for less work when he got to parliament, but from the man in Shop John's Megan heard different. The man in Shop John's was for Henry Richard, whilst the man of the butcher's shop to where Megan went for her bit o' meat was all for Fothergill. Then the women when lining up for to be there ready when the tap middle of the Row came on for them to cetch a drop o' water, the women waiting with their buckets and bowls and tubs for water made confusion worse confounded by each saying what they had heard from their husbands and from one and the other. 'That's what I heard he said to them listening to him in the Drill Hall, my gel. Said about the bosses of the works an' pits round here taking enough money out o' the place to buy up Queen Victoria a dozen times over. But

there, it's no business of ours. 'Lections is men's business. I heard about two women being on the platform of the Drill Hall when Fothergill was speaking. There's brazen, if you like.'

'One of 'em his wife, p'raps,' said Liza Phillips.

'I didn't know he had a wife,' said Annie Morgan. 'Any-way, it would be more than my life's worth to go a-near a meeting. That Ike o' mine would give me meeting.'

'It's a good job we in this Row are living back off the road a bit,' said the timid Jane Ward. 'For on the voting day there'll sure to be murder out there on the main road.'

'Oh,' said Liza Phillips, 'I likes to see a bit o' fightin' 'lection-time. I was standing outside The Black Cock the voting day when Henry Richard got in instead o' Bruce that time, an' there was men there fighting with their shirts off an' nobody to stop 'em. Not Henry Richard's men, but them who was for Fothergill against them who was for Bruce. All over the Pontmorlais Square they was fighting with their shirts off.'

There was all sorts of talk going about, but when all was said and done the same two men went back to Parliament, and the Englishman, Halliday, was defeated, 'but not disgraced', was what Will insisted when he came home after the declaration of the result of the voting. He threatened to give Joe a dab in the eye because Joe – whose boss, the auctioneer, had been one of Fothergill's sub-agents – was wearing Fothergill's colours.

'You'll dab nobody in the eye,' Megan told him. 'All the same, now that the old fuss an' bother is over for this time again, you may as well throw that old rosette in the fire, Joe bach.'

'I may as well get married now,' Will said to Megan after Joe had gone about his business to somewhere. 'What do you say?'

'It's for you to say. Is her father willing for you to live married next door?'

'Ay, she said.'

'Haven't you asked him yourself?'

'No, Susan said never mind me ask him. She asked him.'

'Oh, she asked him. H'm. I don't care a lot for her.'

'Susan's all right.'

'All right for you, p'raps. Still, if you've made up your mind to marry her you'll want a bit of a suit from somewhere.'

She got him a new suit to get married in and she put a gold sovereign in the pocket of the waistcoat, not for him to be like a beggar on the day. The other hauliers staying home from the pit to hold the rope an' bounce beer out of him, and him without money to pay for beer for 'em, would 'simple' Will in the eyes of the hauliers. So she gave him a sovereign to put in his pocket, and to save old bother she gave Susan a sovereign as well. And Will and Susan was married tidy. 'That's another one gone from here,' said Megan to Joe, 'but he's not gone far. Next door, that's all.'

Joe stood tall and lanky in front of the glass loosening his tie and collar. Clean stiff collar every day he had to have now, and Megan had to send them to be done by the woman on the Glebeland, who was the best in the town for doing stiff collars. Megan tried doing 'em herself, but Joe said they would never do the way she done 'em. So she paid for the woman on the Glebeland to do them. Had to send Joe to his work nice and tidy, for he was getting on well with the auctioneer, who was now paying Joe half a sovereign a week, which was good for a boy only just gone seventeen. By his moustache that was coming, people thought he was older, and that's what Joe wanted them to think when he went about the sales with his boss. Carrying black and blue pencils he went about doing many of the smaller jobs by himself. He was not only what might be called 'Megan's pride', but the pride of the Row in which he was the only man making a living 'without working', as the neighbours said. He, at seventeen, was regarded as a man, but the job he was doing was not

regarded as a job of work. 'Work', as the people of the Row thought, was done only down pits and in ironworks. 'That boy Joe must be clever in his head before he could get on like he have without working,' Annie Morgan said over the wall between the two houses to Liza Phillips. 'That's schoolin', my gel,' said Liza, sitting on the wall a minute to watch Joe as he left for work – well, business, then – looking like a gentleman. 'Megan keeps him lovely,' sighed Annie Morgan. 'Foolish about him she is,' said Liza. 'Look at her watching him go from her doorstep.' Susan came yawning out of next door to ask over the wall for something, but Megan waved her hand for peace to watch Joe out o' sight. Then, and not before, did she listen to what Susan had to say over the wall. For there was a low wall, about two-feet high, between each couple of houses in the Row. When a woman wanted a word with, or the lend of something from, the woman next door either side, she did not trouble to go out of her bit of baili and around, but called over the wall between the houses, where they often sat of an evening, for flat flag-stones crowned the two-feet of walling, and they were cool to sit on in hot summers, during which, in the evenings, the Row was a long string of gossip more kindly than otherwise. Items travelled the length of the Row both ways, passed from mouth to mouth over each little wall between.

Nothing was what you could call 'private' in the Row. All domestic matters were more or less public matters for the Row in which they were dealt with in a variety of ways. When the 'truant officer' came to the Row after one or more of the children, he was never allowed inside the house, but interviewed as though he was an applicant for something standing on the bit o' baili, with the mother of the child he wanted sent to school more regularly looking coldly at him from her doorstep. On all the other doorsteps right and left, a neighbour woman assisting in the freezing process which made the 'truant officer' shiver in

summer. ‘The cheeky old sod,’ they said one to the other from their doorsteps as they watched him going after having been interviewed by a couple of the Row’s mothers.

They were all out on their doorsteps when they heard or saw the lamp-oil man with his bell, the sandman and cockle-man calling, or the postman, silent, but far from unobserved, coming over the bridge towards the Row, in which the appearance of the postman was startling, to say the least. If he came once a month with one letter to deliver in the Row, then the neighbours said: ‘That postman is here very often lately.’ Megan was the one he delivered letters to, for there was Moriah writing now and again, and now them in America were writing now and again as well.

They hadn’t been more than a year in America before they sent in a letter the money-paper to Megan for the money she had lent them to go out to America. Good job it came when it did, Megan thought, for the men were on strike again. Susan, who was soon to have a baby, calling over the wall to Megan for lend of a shilling all time. Halliday shouting to the men at the meetings not to give in to the bosses’ demand for a 10 per cent reduction, and in the papers it said that Halliday was keeping the men out because he was mad owing to his having been defeated when trying for parliament the year before. It was a hard time for the people of the Row, especially for them that had a lot o’ children. Megan with her hand in her purse all time, and having to go to the bank to ‘sign her hand’ for more, for she couldn’t refuse if you crowned her. Women in the Row ashamed to ask Megan for lend of any more money would stand half-starved on their doorsteps holding on to the door-frames watching their children going across the bridge on their way to school with all the food there was to eat in *their* little bellies. Their fathers had a bit o’ stone-breaking given them to do, and for which they had notes for so much food, but only so much, and the children they had most of it. And the women with the

string of their aprons tightened over their empty bellies stood holding on to their door-frames trying to laugh an' talk same as they used to. One week after the last which was bad enough, God, He knew, and the spring of the year it came to help the women to bear up. For the spring of the year brought the green to Penydarren Park, which the women could see from their doorsteps, and the birds it brought singing to the trees in the Park they could see far side of the main road, and the sun strengthened as the days went by one after the other without a penny from anywhere.

Megan had to go to some of the women who could hardly stand for want of food to ask: 'Do you want lend of a shilling?' Had to make them take it. Twenty-one long weeks, and the breasts of the couple or three nursing mothers of the Row almost dried up. Twenty-one weeks without a penny from anywhere – only the notes for a bit o' food an' the shilling borrowed here an' there. Old Marged Ellis coming to Megan week after week nearly off her head because people living in her houses had no rent for her. 'They have no food, never mind rent,' Megan told Marged Ellis pretty sharp. 'Don't bother about old rent till the men are working again, Marged Ellis. Going round after rent week after week only to make your corns worse you are. No good you talk about sending the bum-bailiff after 'em, for murder him the women would. Yes, an' I'd help them if the bum-bailiff came to this Row.'

Twenty-one weeks without a penny before the settlement came at last to make women cry for joy; but some o' the men they cursed flashes. For now after twenty-one weeks on strike they were having to go back to work with a $12\frac{1}{2}$ off their wages when they began to earn, a greater reduction than they would have had to suffer had they gone to work the beginning of January instead of at the beginning of June. 'The men now having realised the seriousness of the position,' the paper said, 'have accepted a reduction of $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, instead of the 10 per cent reduction they were asked to accept in January....'

But the paper said there would be no more strikes now that, with the men back at work again, there was a joint committee of owners and men's leaders, and that committee was to make the sliding-scale agreement which would make strikes impossible. But that man Halliday, said the paper, would not be a member of the committee. Our own 'Mabon', the paper said, was the man that would speak for us on that committee.

But Will, like the rest of the hauliers, would have it that Halliday was a better leader than Mabon any day. 'Better for making strikes p'raps,' Megan told him over the wall. The women of the Row now coming on pay-Saturdays to Megan with a shilling off what they owed her 'since the old strike', as they said. August now, everybody working, and the women of the Row beginning to look better for the food they was having again.

From Scranton in America money-papers for Norah and her children, and Miriam and her children, to go out there to Llew' and 'Lias. Megan was in next door helping Martha James to bring Susan's baby – though it was little help Martha wanted to bring a baby into the world – when Norah and Miriam and their children came with their breath in their fists to tell her. Laughing they was, but Megan couldn't laugh with 'em. They going made her feel like she didn't know what. They were part of her two brothers over the sea, and when they would be gone over the sea as well there would be nothing of her two brothers – two as tidy men as ever was – left for her to set eyes on. However, she must 'send' their wives and children smiling.

She made Joe write a letter to ask Moriah to come from London to 'send' Norah and Miriam and the children, but Moriah she wrote back to say that she was sorry she couldn't come, for she was going to sing opera for some Carl Rosa in London. . . .

'She'll do,' said Megan resentfully, 'never mind reading the rest, Joe bach. All for herself your sister Moriah is.'

Joe said that she couldn't be blamed for not coming if it

meant her losing such a chance. If she came she could say no more than she had said in the letter.

'You don't know Moriah like I do,' said Megan. 'All for herself all the time. What do she, a married woman, want singing like if she wasn't married all over the place? Shon is soft to let her. But never mind her. She'll come before I ask her again.'

So to 'send' Norah and Miriam and their children as far as the station, there was only Norah's parents, Dan and Peg Delaney, Will and Susan, Susan with the baby they had named Owen in the shawl, Megan, her father, and Joe. Megan had stopped her father and her brother Will from next door going to the pit that day. 'Plenty time for work after they're gone on the train,' she told them. 'Let as many as can be there to "send" 'em as far as the station.'

'Not as many going to-day as the day our Llew' an' 'Lias went,' said Will, looking like a rodney beside Joe on the platform.

Megan, trying hard not to cry, was holding her false smile as hard as she could for Miriam's benefit. Norah she was crying between her father an' mother, Dan and Peg Delaney. The boxes were in the luggage van, the bags and bundles filling the rack of the compartment Norah and Miriam and their children would fill when that guard with his flag and whistle — There it is now. The same old hurried cries, wet kisses, tight embraces, with the guard unperturbed flagging the engine-driver's fireman. There it goes. Going — going — *gone*.

Those on the platform looking helplessly one at the other. 'Come on,' sighs Megan. 'I must get back to the office,' said Joe briskly. 'Yes, go you,' said Megan. Their father, now more friendly with Dan Delaney than Megan had ever thought to see him with any man, let alone an Irishman, said he would go up as far as Penydarren with Dan for a bit of a walk. 'Go you,' said Megan to him again. Then Will he stopped talking to one of the hauliers home

with a broken arm, so there was only Megan and Susan, and Susan's baby in the shawl crossing the bridge to go into Megan's house.

'Sit down,' said Megan to Susan, 'an' I'll make a cup o' tea for us two. Soon I'll be left like bopa Lloyd was an' like Marged Ellis is now, all by myself.'

'You ought to get married,' said Susan, quite simply, as she opened her bodice to give the baby the breast.

'Did I?' said Megan, not interested much, but fetching cups and saucers to the table.

'O' course. All young women should get married.'

'I'm not so young.'

'Nor so *old either.'

'I feel as old as Marged Ellis this morning, and I could cry - yes, I could cry my eyes out this very minute.'

'I always cries when I wants to,' said Susan, smoothing her baby's hair. 'For it's best to cry than not to cry - that's if you want to cry.'

After wetting the tea Megan stood looking at Susan and the baby at her breast for a bit, then she said: 'You're a funny gel.'

'Am I?'

'Well, ain't you?'

'I don't know,' said Susan.

'Come to this cup o' tea,' said Megan. 'Let me have the baby a minute.'

'No, let him suck,' said Susan.

They drank their tea, and the baby he went to sleep in his mother's arms.

CHAPTER XI

'HIGH ENGLISH WITH A DASH OF ITALIAN'

'WELL, well, well, well, after all these years,' Megan said, when she opened the door, which Shon, from where he sat in the trap, had been knocking with the handle of the whip. 'Where have you come from, Shon?'

'The boys around here have forgotten me,' he cried, laughing out loud. 'They used to run to scotch my wheels for sixpence.'

'I can do with sixpence,' cried Liza Phillips as she ran off her doorstep for two stones to scotch the wheels of Shon's trap, all the neighbour's out laughing.

'I haven't less than a shilling,' said Shon, looking at a handful of silver.

'Never mind, a shilling will do,' said Liza.

'Yes, and you'll do,' laughed Shon, handing her the shilling.

'Hadn't you better come in?' Megan said, blushing because of the old show being made.

'I'll mind your horse for another shilling,' said Liza, touching her forehead.

'He's all right,' said Shon, getting down out of the trap carefully, and now Megan could see how fat he was getting. Still he was tall enough to carry a bit of extra fat without too much trouble. As smartly dressed as before, driving-gloves an' all.

'Sit you down,' said Megan, dusting a chair that didn't want dusting.

Shon sat down and looked around, smiling. 'This is the first time I've been inside this house, isn't it?'

'Where have you come from all at once?"

'May I smoke?' he asked, a cigar in his hand.

'Smoke you.'

'Why don't you sit down?' he said to her. She sat down; he lit the cigar. 'From Nottinghamshire and the Black Country, and all over the place. Thought I'd like to hear a bit of Welsh again. Packed up, boxed my pony and sent him on, got here myself with the late train from Cardiff last night.'

'Come here to sell again you have then?"

He laughed. 'That's what I've been wanting to hear for years now. "Come here to sell again you have then," that's what I've been wanting to hear.'

'Where's Moriah with you?' said Megan, sober as a judge.

'She's not with me. She's in Italy.'

'It – What in the name o' God is she doing there?"

Shon chuckled. 'Didn't she write to tell you? She's gone there to learn to sing the Italian way.'

'What way is that then?"

Shon just waved his cigar as much as to say 'Don't ask me.'

'Well, wherever she's gone, it's your fault,' Megan told him. 'It's you have raised her sleeve and left her go about talking high English an' – '

Shon leaned back in the chair, laughing. 'High English, ha, ha. I like that. Well, when next you see her she'll be talking high English with a dash of Italian, ha, ha.'

'Don't sit there making fun of her,' said Megan sharply.

'I'm not making fun of her. How's your father?"

'He's all right.'

'And Will and Joe?"

'Tidy an' well, thank you for asking. Will's married to the gel next door, Susan her name is. Did Moriah tell you that I sent in a letter to ask her to come an' "send" Norah an' Miriam, and that she wouldn't come from where she was singing opera?"

'She may have. You're looking well.'

'I'm all right. You're looking well yourself, but awful

fat you're getting. No doubt by riding about all the time, not using your legs. It wouldn't have been much for Moriah to come an' "send" 'em.'

'You're right. How are they getting on out there?'

'Better than ever they got on here. Not one letter have they had from Moriah since they're there.'

'Well, you see, Moriah - '

'You needn't say. Moriah's like you used to say, "looking after number one".'

'She's determined to become a great singer. As soon as she had that money left her she - '

'Yes, an' couldn't I have spent my bit o' money to have training too. But I looked to Joe an' the others instead. Not a penny have she - not that I'd take a penny from her.'

'If ever you're in need - '

'Now don't you fret, I won't be in need, Shon. So leave it there. But it's a funny life you two are living. Oh, look at me not asking if you'd like a cup o' tea.'

'I'd like a cup to drink,' said Shon.

'Then you shall have it in one minute,' she said, putting the cloth doubled in half over half the table. 'You won't know our little Joe that was.'

'I don't suppose I will.'

'He's an auctioneer now, a real auctioneer, not a Cheap -' She stopped to laugh at herself, and he laughed too. 'I very near said it,' she said.

'I know you did. Well, all I hope is that he'll make as much money at *real* auctioneering as I have as a Cheap Jack.'

'Oh, Joe will get on. He talks now just like Moriah do.'

'High English, do you mean?' he laughed.

'Call it what you like. You put sugar an' milk yourself. When will you be starting to sell here in Merthyr?'

'Not until the end of the week. By the time the stuff arrives and the place fixed properly - '

'Is it the same tent you got all time?'

'Tent, do you call it?' he said, spilling some tea by laughing.

'Well, the top o' the place you had here before was like the top of a tent.'

'So it was, but I've a much bigger and better fit-up now. Match-boarded roof with waterproof cloth over.'

'Why don't you have a proper shop here in Merthyr? a shop like the Cloth Hall or The Temple o' Fashion? Then you could stop Moriah running about like she do. Have a proper house for her to look to – though she was never much good about the house. But no doubt she'd come after a bit if only she had a house to look to. Until she have, then I'm afraid it's go about she will same as you.'

Shon shook his head. 'Not the same as I do. Moriah has gone too far ahead for me, Megan. She's not Moriah any more, anyway. Calls herself Moriana, Madame Moriana.'

'Who said?'

'She, she herself said. Said that it would be useless her trying to get on with her own name. Must have a foreign name to get on as a singer.'

'If ever her singing will be as good as the name of Moriah Davies, then she'll get on all right. Haven't Martha Harries, Lizzie Evans, Jennie Williams an' Hattie Davies, an' many more Welsh gels got on by singing without any old foreign name? Wait till I send her a letter. I'll – what name did you say she's going to call herself?'

'Madame Moriana.'

'I'll madame her. But it's your fault. Have more tea?' He shook his head. 'I didn't ask you to have food, did I?'

'I don't want anything to eat, thank you.'

'You should have told her at the beginning, then there wouldn't have been this old madame nonsense.'

'I did speak to her, but she told me that she had paid for training with her own money and –'

'Then didn't I have my own money same as her? Yes,

but I didn't start calling myself madame this an' that like some old circus woman. You wait till I write in the letter – for it isn't only she can write. Where is she out there for me to write to tell her?"

'Here's her address,' said Shon, feeling for a letter.

'Anything not for me to see in this?' said Megan as she took the letter.

'Nothing private,' said Shon. 'Moriah and I have never written to each other in that way. More on a business footing.'

'What are you talking about now?' said Megan, disturbed by what he had said, and the way he said it.

'It doesn't matter.'

'It do matter if you an' Moriah are not living tidy.'

'We're *tidy* enough. Maybe *too* tidy,' he said, as he got up to look out through the open doorway at his pony. 'How do you like my pony?'

'The pony's right enough.'

'Now that I am your lawful brother-in-law, would it be right for you to come for a drive with me some day?'

'Right or wrong, I'm not. If Moriah was with you as she should be – an' would be if you handled her right, then I might ride behind the two of you. But not by myself. People in this place don't want much to make a bad name out of.'

Shon looked at her, smiling faintly. 'You haven't altered much, have you?'

'I'm sure you haven't. Moriah could do as she liked with you then, and she's doing as she likes with you now.'

He tossed his half-smoked cigar away beyond the little baili. 'Perhaps you'd better not come to my "tent", as you call it, when I start business.'

'For why won't I come?'

'The people might talk, might give you a bad name?'

'I won't be by myself with you there for people to talk.'

'I wonder now how you came to ask me in.'

'I left my door open, didn't I?'

'Of course you did. Well, may as well go for a bit of a canter before – Is Will in work?'

'Where else would he be at this time o' day?'

'You're right. Tell him to call and see me at the Castle Hotel to-night.'

'What would the likes o' him be doing in the Castle Hotel?'

'Well, he's not T.T., is he?'

'No, but the drop he takes to drink he takes in places like The Black Cock. Anyway, I'll tell him, an' let him please hisself. Sunday – for I don't like to think of you having your Sunday dinner in that place by yourself, p'raps you'll eat a bit o' dinner here with us?'

'That would be grand.'

'An' p'raps come to Zoar Chapel with us after?'

'I'll see. Good-bye.' His hand was on its way up to his hat when he remembered that Megan was not the stickler for that sort of thing as Moriah was these days.

'Good-bye for now then,' said Megan, Moriah's letter to him in her hand. She stood in the doorway watching him climb up into his trap, and the neighbours in their doorways also watched him. In the trap, with the reins and the whip in his hand, he looked along the line until he saw Liza Phillips in her doorway. 'What about these scotches under my wheels?' he cried jokingly. 'Now you've had your pay –'

'Yes, but you're not backing away, are you?' she said. 'A man should never go backwards at anything, you know.' There was general laughter as he drove off, but Megan she only smiled a wry smile, for there was too much old show for her taste. She went in to watch Shon out of sight through the window.

Elias and Miriam and their children, and Llewelyn, but not his wife and children, were in their Welsh chapel in Scranton, Pennsylvania, that evening. Norah and her children they went to the Catholic Church to Mass, and Llewelyn didn't object here any more than when they had

gone to different places of worship in Merthyr over the sea. This evening, at the after meeting, it was announced that Joseph Parry, now Dr. Joseph Parry, was coming to visit his relations and friends in America. The glad news was flashed from state to state, and the membership of the four hundred Welsh chapels of America when meeting each other said: 'I suppose you've heard that Joseph Parry's on his way home.' For Welsh-America claimed the one-time roller in the ironworks of Danville, Pa., who was now Mus. Doc. and Professor of Music at Aberystwyth College in the land of his fathers. Twenty years he had lived at Danville, Pennsylvania, before returning famous to the land of his birth, which he had left before he could read a word or a note of music. America, Welsh-America had given him back to Wales as a great musician and composer, by far the greatest man of music Wales could point to.

His parents still in America, his relatives and thousands of friends still in America, all wildly excited now that he is on his way back 'home' after an absence of six years, six crowded years. 'Cartref', they sang in their chapels and their homes, those scores of thousands of Welsh miners and ironworkers, who had with Joseph Parry left their homes in Wales to help lay the foundation of the new world's industrial greatness. The cream of the industrial population of Wales, skilful and industrious coalminers and ironworkers, now helping to make America. Among them the brothers, Llewelyn and Elias Davies, who, but for the bit o' money their sister Megan had after old bopa Lloyd, would not now be in Scranton, Pennsylvania, doing so well as they were.

They, Llew' and 'Lias, are more excited than any other two Welsh-Americans at the prospect of seeing Joseph Parry again. 'Joe bach', as they called him, when, as boys working together in Roblin's pit, they also sang together amongst the altos of Rosser Beynon's choir. Little did they think then that 'Joe bach' Parry would become far greater than Rosser Beynon or any other Welsh musician. For

then when he was only nine years of age 'Joe bach' Parry was working hard down Roblin's Pit for a half-crown a week.

That was a long time ago, way back in the days when 'Joe bach' Parry didn't know that there was such a place as America, for he had no more schoolin' than Llew' an' 'Lias - an' they had none at all. Those from Merthyr now settled in Pennsylvania, whilst waiting for Dr. Joseph Parry - 'Joe bach, as we used to call him when we was singing boys together under Rosser Beynon, whose bardic title was Asaph Glan-Taff' - to arrive, the Merthyr people settled in Pennsylvania and in other states as well, made the most of the fact that Dr. Parry was 'a Merthyr boy, same as us'. He, Dr. Parry, they maintained, 'had it in him before ever he left Merthyr when a boy to come to America. For we in Merthyr were born singing. Wasn't it in Merthyr that *The Messiah* was first given in Wales from start to finish in eighteen-forty, when not a handful knew music to read it? But the conductor he knew a bit, an' that was enough, for we in Merthyr in them days didn't want music to sing by - as Joseph Parry can tell you. As long as the conductor knew a bit - talk about conductors. Why, Merthyr used to lend conductors to other places to train their choirs for the National. Remember Dai Francis? Well, we lent him to Carmarthen the year the National was there - in eighteen-sixty-seven it was - to get a choir ready to sing. Yes, we had it in us in Merthyr, an' Joe bach Parry had it in him before ever he came to America. . . .'

To hear those Merthyr chaps now in America talk you'd think it was Merthyr that had made Dr. Joseph Parry the great musician he now undoubtedly was. But no fear. Driven his father, and the mother with her children after the father to America in '54, was all Merthyr ever did for Joseph Parry. He left Merthyr a poverty-stricken boy in '54. But it's no good talking about those days now that Dr. Parry is so famous, and a great welcome is being

prepared for him by the four hundred Baptist, Methodist, and Independent Chapels of America, in any of which you'd think you was still in Wales, for not a word in any other language but Welsh can you hear. In the chapels they sang hymns for which Dr. Parry had written the music, and in their homes they sang his songs.

Llew' an' Lias couldn't wait for the man to come as arranged to Scranton. No, they had to go to Danville to welcome him. And the shock they had when they saw him and shook hands with him that day in Danville. For he had gone to look so old, and if they didn't know his age they would never have believed that he was only same age as Llew', which was forty next birthday. But Dr. Parry was going grey, nearly white in patches, and he looked ill into the bargain. Nothing like the man he was when he was head roller in the ironworks at Danville. There were men there who had worked with him in the rolling-mill that time, and they with hardly a grey hair. Yet here was Dr. Parry nearly white – and looking bad he was. Judging by the look of him, studying and composing must be harder than working in the rolling-mill, but he was studying and composing for years before he left the rolling-mill. Then that three years' hard work at the Academy, from where he used to go singing and adjudicating into Wales for a bit of pocket-money. Back to America to direct a Musical Institute in Danville, and to play the organ on Sundays at a Wilkesbarre Chapel. Three years' hard work before returning to Wales to become Professor of Music at a college by the sea, where he went on composing a mile a minute. Opera, oratorio, songs and hymn-tunes, and after six years of it, here he is back in America looking old and he not forty, and looking washed out as well.

'Still, he's here, and that's the main thing,' everybody said. Representatives of the Welsh communities of a dozen states there to welcome him and, if possible, to 'fix a date' when he would talk, play, sing or conduct. 'We're hoping that you'll be able to include us in your tour,' said those of

Scranton, Wilkesbarre, Pottsville, Cleveland, Pittsburg, Youngstown — and the people who had just finished building Chicago's first Welsh chapel wouldn't take no for an answer. New York, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Tennessee, between them all nearly killed the man with their welcomes and applause. In Cincinnati he collapsed, and in the home of a friend was put to bed for a fortnight, a fortnight during which Welsh-America held its breath. Yes, held its breath, for Dr. Parry was very ill indeed.

But, thank goodness, after a fortnight in bed in Cincinnati, he was up and about again, and there were no two in America more relieved to hear that he was up and about again than Llew' an' 'Lias. Llew' made his eldest girl, who was having her voice trained in the hope of becoming a great singer like her bopa Moriah, Llew' as soon as he had heard the good news from Cincinnati, made that eldest girl of his sit down there and then to write a letter home to her bopa Megan to say that Dr. Parry who had for a fortnight been so bad in bed in Cincinnati, was now well again. 'Your mother will say what else you're to write — but mind you ask your bopa Megan to be sure to write to tell me how my father your grandfather is.' The girl's mother then began telling the girl what to tell her bopa Megan to go up and tell Dan and Peg Delaney from their daughter Norah who would be writing them herself soon.

Megan was slowly reading the letter from America to her father, who was sitting in his bit o' black in the arm-chair having food, still in his bit o' black for he had just returned after following Mike Murphy to the Cefn. Mike had dropped dead on the road as on his way home after a double-shift in the works, and Rhys had come early out of the pit the day of the funeral to follow him to the Cefn, to where he walked beside Dan Delaney. The letter from America came whilst he was at the funeral, now Megan, who reads much better now since Joe showed her how, is reading it. After she had read the part about Dr. Parry

being so bad in bed out there, and now well again, she paused to say: 'Thank God for that.' Her father said 'Amen' quietly. She went on reading the letter to herself, pausing to give bits in her own words to her father. 'Llew's gel, the eldest – the one that was so delicate – is having her voice trained out there like Moriah have here – well, London, not here. But she, if you please, had to go to Italy. . . . So that gel of Llew's must be better than when she was here, for when she was here she had all she could do to cetch her breath, let alone sing. 'Lias an' Miriam an' their children, the letter says, are grand. All send their love to us. An' that's all for us, the rest is for me to go up to Penydarren to Norah's mother an' father with. Was Dan Delaney at the funeral?'

'Yes,' her father said. 'Him an' me walked together.'

'I wonder what'll happen to poor old Bridget Murphy, God help her, now that Mike's gone?' said Megan as she rose to put the letter from America on the mantelpiece. Will would want to see it when he came home from the pit, Joe also when he came home from the office, then she, Megan, would go with it in her hand up as far as the Delaneys' house in Penydarren. On her return from there she would put it safe with all the other letters she had received – not many in all – from Moriah and from them in America.

Her father was going to take off his bit o' black, which he wore on Sundays and to attend funerals. 'No, keep 'em on, an' go out somewhere for a bit of a walk,' said Megan. But he wouldn't. Hardly ever went out now, except to his work, or a funeral like to-day. To chapel on Sundays he went regular, but not out for a walk of an evening – especially pay-Saturday evening – like he used to. Megan and Will from next door had tried their best to liven their dad up a bit. 'Will,' Megan would call over the wall, 'come an' try to persuade dad to go for a bit of a walk down-town with you; he's here in his arm-chair looking like I don't know what.' Will tried and tried, but it was no use.

Rhys had left the thin seam, in which he had worked with his sons for butties one after the other, to work in the thicker seam, the famous four-feet seam, in the working of which a man moved about in a stooping position. For thirty years he had worked thin seams of coal, as thin as twenty inches between rock roof and bottom at times, lying first on one side, then on the other, to hew with mandrels the coal. Getting too old and stiff for that now, so he left the thin seams to younger men, and got himself a working-place in the four-feet seam, where he had working with him as butty the boy of a collier who, after losing a leg, had become what was called 'a roadman' in the four-feet seam.

'Ianto Peg, the roadman', nearly everybody called him now. A few called him by his proper name, as Rhys did, his proper name being Evan Evans. He travelled the roadways of the four-feet seam keeping the tram-way rails in place, and putting them back in their place after they had been displaced by nature and by accident. In places what was called 'puckings' would make things difficult for Ianto Peg. For where the flooring was a soft, half-rock, half-clay mixture, it would rise, like dough in the pan after the yeast was in, to cover the rails. Not so fast as dough would rise, but it would rise more surely — for sometimes you get bad yeast that don't make the dough rise. Any-way, like that the flooring would swell over sleepers and rails like dough over the edge of the pan. When it did it would reduce the travelling height for man and beast, then the poor horses would be all day having their rumps 'roughed' raw by the rock roof or roof-timber. For a horse cannot, when hitched to one or two trams empty or loaded with coal, go about like a man in his two doubles. So the horse in the pit is 'roughed' raw when there is not height for him to travel in. These swellings of the flooring called 'puckings' robbed the horses of necessary height, and when the 'puckings' got to be very bad men were worked overtime after the horses had finished travelling with coal in trams behind them, and these men worked overtime 'cutting

puckings', as the job was called, which meant that with mandrels they loosened the top layer about a foot thick, then with shovels filled it into trams. So they 'made' height for the horses to travel without 'roughing', but usually not before the horses had had more than their share of 'roughing'.

It is, in a way, funny how, in a pit-roadway, the bottom or flooring 'pucks' upwards as the roof or top comes slowly down, and the two sides like a concertina shutting slowly all time. So there is plenty to do keeping open the underground roadways which are continually subject to such terrific pressure, pressure which loudly cracks the stout hearts of the thickest pit-props. 'Repairing' is a most important job, and the repairers in the pit who keep the roadways 'open' for man and beast and trams empty and loaded with coal to travel along, and for the air to travel as well – for without air where are we? – are, these repairers which some call 'timbermen', are men upon whom the rest of us have to depend for many things. The repairers notch, or fit together what they call 'pairs of timber' to hold the roof up and keep the sides back. With their hatchets they notch the 'arms' and 'collars' of timber which they afterwards fix to withstand a world of roof and side-pressure. Fine chaps, these timbermen, and talk about using a hatchet – But to get back to Ianto Peg, the roadman.

Ianto Peg's tools consisted of one mandrel, one shovel, a light sledge, and a small but stout canvas bag in which he carried nails and cramps for nailing and cramping the rails to the wooden sleepers. These sleepers when dry-rotted by pit-air, or gone soft in water, would not hold the nails, which in turn held the rails to the sleepers. Then Ianto Peg had to change the old sleepers, put new ones in their place – that's if he could get new sleepers. More often than not he was short of new sleepers to replace the rotten ones, out of which the nails would jump as the trams went over the rails, and the rails with nothing to hold them in place would become displaced, and the trams empty and

full would find no rails where there should have been rails. Down the trams would go into the water and sludge, the hauliers would curse flashes and shout: 'Ianto Peg, Ianto Peg, where's Ianto Peg to mend this road?'

Ianto Peg would come hopping as fast as he could through the sludge with his tools and his bag o' nails and cramps. 'Why don't you keep this blasted road tidy for us hauliers to drive over?' the haulier would shout. 'Yes, why don't you?' the master-haulier would shout. 'Get me new sleepers then,' Ianto Peg would shout back at 'em, as he felt for the rail or rails displaced in the sludge. 'Lifting our guts out every day,' the haulier standing above him saying; 'hurry up,' the master-haulier saying. 'Give us a chance,' from Ianto Peg, half-man, half-fish in the water and sludge groping. Finds the rail and fixes it so as the tram which, with the coal it is loaded with, weighs about a ton and a half, can be lifted on to it and then by the horse drawn away.

Hauliers, master-hauliers, overmen and others, all the day calling 'Ianto Peg'. The master-haulier who was always saying: 'Do try an' keep something like a road for these hauliers to drive enough coal to fire the boilers on top o' the pit, if no more.' Something to do with 'em all. Sometimes the 'wings' of partings flew away from the rotten sleeper as the horse was drawing a loaded tram over it, and the loaded tram crashed into the side-timber to knock it out and bring down a fall of roof which buried horse and tram. Then the band played – the haulier not injured, for he walked behind loaded trams going around partings when going down slopes.

'Partings' they call the specially made arrangement of rails and sleepers which 'turn' roadways left and right off the main headings – not to be confused with 'double-partings' on which the trains of loaded trams called 'journeys' are marshalled. No, the 'partings' meant here are little partings to 'turn' roadways left and right of headings for colliers to follow the coal at right and left angles

from the main heading. So there are right-hand and left-hand partings, and when a section of these ‘partings’ became displaced then it was: ‘Where’s Ianto Peg to mend this parting?’

One day the wing of Rhys Davies’s ‘parting’ flew off the sleeper as the horse was drawing a loaded tram over it, so off the road it went, and Ianto Peg was shouted for. He came, and when he did he smiled at his own boy, who was working as butty to Rhys Davies. ‘Well, son, how do you like working butties with Rhys Davies?’ he asked, chuckling as he dropped his tools and bag of nails and cramps to investigate. ‘Never mind bothering with that boy,’ cried the haulier. ‘Fix this parting so as I can get this tram back on the rails and drive on before that master-haulier comes cursing flashes again.’ So Ianto Peg fixed the parting, and afterwards he had a word with the boy his son who worked with Rhys Davies.

That was the day before. Next morning it happened. The water ‘broke in’, as they said, and the water it took Ianto Peg well out of sound of hauliers’ voices shouting ‘Come and mend this road’. The four-feet coal was such good coal – everybody knows what good coal the Welsh four-feet seam coal is – and the nearer the colliers got to the old workings the easier the coal worked. Could almost work it with bare hands. So the output went up, and the colliers working by the ton made better wages than ever before. All the same, some of the older colliers, and Rhys Davies was one of ‘em, grew more nervous as the days went by. For they knew – what was to stop them knowing? – that they were driving forward in the direction of the old workings in which, so the older men thought, there must be enough water confined to ‘drown the pit’, as they said. If that water was let loose, was ‘tapped’, they would all be drowned. All there was between them and the water was the barrier of coal they were working on, and daily making less of. ‘We can’t,’ said some of the older men, ‘be far off the old workings now. Time we stopped working on

this piece of coal between us and the water in them old workings.'

The younger colliers, now making money like steam, laughed. 'Nowhere near the old workings yet. Anyway, how do you know that there's all that much water on there in the old workings? By this time it sure to have soaked away into the other old workings where the old-timers worked the pillar an' stall way with their wives for butties. Them old-timers must have had a fine time with their wives down the pits with 'em.' This made all the young colliers laugh, but the older men didn't laugh for thinking of the water, and one of them suggested talking to the overman about it. For the water must be on there somewhere, they thought. Little pumping had been done, and they in the light of their greater experience couldn't see the 'soaking away' theory of the younger colliers.

But before they had quite made up their mind to talk to the overman about it, the water made up its mind not to suffer confinement any longer. Two men were working together in the heading, the nearest point to the old workings, and when one of them sounded with his mandrel the coal in front of him next morning, it caused a sound something like the sound made by a pig's bladder blown up to play football with gives out when kicked. 'That don't sound right to me,' said one heading chap to the other. 'Try it again for me to hear,' said the other. Another test knock on the coal. Soggy, ominous, the sound. 'No, don't sound right to me either. Wait till I try a knock.' He knocked. One – one – one-two-three. 'Let's clear out. You go through the skip to the other heading to warn the chaps, I'll go down this heading and through to the level – quick, never mind dressing again.'

Like a gob-fire wild they spread the alarm, and men, boys, horses and hauliers ran like mad towards the pit-bottom. Horses with their iron shafting on stamped. 'Look out in front there,' shouted their hauliers, hanging on to their horses' tails. If only they could get to the high ground

back beyond what they called 'the swamp', there would be a chance – 'Look out for these horses.' Racing past two old abandoned deeps on the right and thinking that they will perhaps take some of the water and lessen its speed as it races after them to drown them in the dark drowning darkness making naked-light lamps hiss when being extinguished with lives not hissing being extinguished – *Listen.*

'Don't stop to listen, but run, run for your lives. Your lives.' Behind them, in from where they have fled, a succession of dull pounces, like the beating of a huge under-strung drum distant, followed by a sound like that of a mighty clearance – 'Run, boy,' cried Rhys Davies to Ianto Peg's son.

'There's dad,' cried the boy, pointing to where his father, Ianto Peg, is clinging to a side-timber.

'What's the matter, Ianto?' shouts Rhys Davies.

'Never mind, you see to my boy. Old horse's shaft going past – hit my old stump dead – can't put weight on peg – go with the boy, Rhys.'

'Run, boy,' said Rhys, fixing his naked-light lamp in the loop sewn to the poke of his cap. 'Run you, I'll bring your father.' The boy runs with the other gasping sprinters as Rhys Davies grabs the peg-legged one clinging to the side-timber to carry him like a baby. 'Hold fast to me, Ianto,' he said, trotting crouched over his heavy burden. Hunched up, the last of those running down the slope to the swamp. There are lights now dotting the rising ground beyond the swamp. 'The boy will be back there now,' said Ianto being carried like a baby. Rhys had no breath to spare for talking. His eyes on the rise beyond the swamp, his ears full of the sound of the rushing of water now not far behind, he trotted. Mouth and nose he has to use to breathe in and out as sweat blinds him. Crossing the swamp, the burden in his arms sinking him deep in sludge out of which he tears each foot with a suction 'plop'. Across the swamp and starting up the rise he is when the water, carrying

trams and timber and tools, rushes cackling after him. The water uses one of the many heavy pit-timbers it is carrying along to hit Rhys Davies a wallop back o' the head, which fails to down him – but the next wallop does. From an empty iron tram the second wallop, the heaviest punch the rushing water was carrying. Rhys Davies is down.

On top of the rise looking down and out on the baffled expanse of water stands an old overman with tobacco-juice dribbling out of his mouth to stain his grey beard. In his hand a hatchet with which he has not long ago battered down doors to make ways for water to weaken itself by losing itself left and right. But for what he has done the water would have topped the rise, would have topped it before some of the men and boys did. At his side stands a master-haulier.

'There,' said the overman, spitting tobacco-juice into the water, 'it won't rise any higher. A lot of it will soak away by morning. I never thought there was so much water in them old workings. You're sure that everybody's out from there?'

'Yes, every horse, man and boy,' said the master-haulier, putting 'horse' first as one who had so much to do with horses and hauliers. Then Ianto Peg's son came running from the pit-bottom towards them to ask where his father was, and where his butty, Rhys Davies, was.

'Ain't they back at the pit-bottom?' said the overman.

'No,' said the boy.

'Oh,' said the overman, looking at the master-haulier first, then at the water again.

'There, there, don't cry,' said the master-haulier to the boy.

CHAPTER XII

MEGAN PUTS JOE IN CHAMBERS

MORIAH interrupted her work in Italy to travel a day and a night home to attend her father's funeral, and now that it was over she was returning to Italy.

'How much longer do you mean to stay there?' asked Megan, who had come to 'send' her as far as the Merthyr railway station.

'Another year or so,' said Moriah.

Megan looked at Shon as much as to say: 'What do you think o' that for cheek?' Aloud she said: 'If you're not careful you'll be too old to sing before you finish learn to sing. But there, between you an' Shon that is.'

'My career is my business, and mine only,' said Moriah, who, Megan noticed now, was going to travel first-class.

'Well, you ought to be able to sing after all the learning you've had,' she said. 'For how long is it since you started learning first?'

The guard robbed her of whatever answer Moriah would have made by first blowing his whistle, and next waving his flag. 'Italy,' said Megan, looking after the train. 'Off to Italy again, Shon?'

'Yes,' said Shon.

'You to go back to your selling, an' me - What a soft old froice you are, Shon. Come on.'

Out of the station they went, and they walked together up as far as the Castle Hotel. 'I'm - well, I hardly know what to say,' said Shon. 'It's you'll miss your father, not Moriah.'

'Shon, Moriah'll never miss anybody, unless she misses herself somehow. As for me - well, there's many worse off

than me. I've still got Joe, thank God. When did you say you was taking your tent from here?"

'Monday morning I shall be leaving for Tonypandy.'

'Then you'll come to eat a bit o' dinner with me an' Joe on Sunday?' He said he would be pleased to, then she left him. He went into the Castle Hotel where he was staying, and she went for an ounce of Ringers' Shag tobacco to take to Bridget Murphy in the Workhouse which Bridget spoke of as 'the Union'. After Mike was buried, it was expected that Eileen would provide a shelter for her mother. But she didn't, or her husband wouldn't, or old Bridget herself didn't want them to — anyway, in the Workhouse she was, and Megan, though she didn't approve of women smoking clay pipes, took her an ounce o' 'bacco a week, and put a cup o' tea on the day each week the old woman was allowed out with the other old women still able to look after themselves.

The funny thing about it was that Bridget, who had always pretended to be afraid of her life of 'the Union', as she called it, was happier than ever she had been now that she was there. She was the life an' soul of the place, the other old women said. When she was out in the town she begged for those of the old women not able to walk out, old women without friends, 'such good friends I have,' said Bridget over a cup o' tea with Megan. 'I know,' said Megan, 'you want me to give you money to buy snuff for that old woman Daly.' 'For her and old Lady Lewis, who's that proud I have to give it her a pinch at a time, like if I was her waiting-maid,' said Bridget. The one she called 'Lady Lewis' was not quite right in her head. She had money years ago when she married a man much younger than herself, a man who, after he had squandered her money, ran away with another man's wife to somewhere. Now she was acting proud in the Workhouse, God help her.

Another funny thing was that Megan liked going to see the old women in the Workhouse. Dai Balaclava at the gate knew her well by this time. With the ounce o' 'bacco

in her hand she passed him, and when she got to where the old women were standing around Bridget Murphy, Bridget took her hand and squeezed it. 'We've heard about your poor da,' she murmured sympathetically.

'No doubt,' said Megan. 'How are you all?'

'We're all fine,' said Bridget, taking the ounce o' 'bacco.

Feeling all the better for the half-hour or so she spent with them, Megan was leaving when Dai Balaclava whispered: 'How about the price of a pint?' 'You'll do,' she said, passing him a threepenny-piece, which would buy him a pint and a half of beer, which would be a good start on his next day out in town. 'Don't get drunk an' lose the gate minding to Sam Sebastopol,' said Megan as she went. It was cold, and the snow we had Christmas was still topping the hills around the town. 'More snow or something by the look of it,' said Dai Balaclava, looking up at the sky, holding the threepenny-bit tight in his fist. Down the hill as far as the Tramroad Megan walked to stand for a minute or so looking down at the Castle Hotel, where Shon was staying, waited on hand and foot. Well, he could pay for tendance –

She jumped as the whistle of an engine she heard. She, like a fool, had been standing between the rails of what was no longer a Tramroad, but a railroad. What everybody still called 'The Tramroad' was by this time widened and strengthened to bear the engine which brought to three unloading points ten-ton trucks of colliers' house-coal from the Plymouth pits. Men working in the pits and works could have as much coal for a few shillings as the tradesmen of the town had to pay fifteen shillings or a pound for. A collier could have – and so could an ironworker, for the same companies owned ironworks and pits – about a ton of coal each month delivered to his door for three shillings and sixpence. What made Megan think of that now as she jumped out of the way of the engine with trucks behind it, was the realisation that no longer would she be able to have coal at privileged rates. Now that her father was dead she

had nobody of her own working in works or pits, so she would now have to buy coal from the coalyards and pay tenpence or a shilling a hundred-weight for it. That's unless I can buy half our Will's monthly load of coal on the sly. Have to be on the sly, for if the companies got to know that those working for 'em made money out of the coal they were being supplied with for next to nothing, then the companies would stop a man's coal — p'raps summons him before the magistrate, an' make him pay a fine. Anyway, she'd see. It was funny after all these years to have nobody at all going from the house to either pit, works, or brick-yard. Made a woman feel out of things somehow, neither fish nor fowl. Whatever would I have done now then, but for the bit o' money bopa Lloyd left? I shall have to look after what's left, for it's little Joe will bring to me for a good time yet.

To have quiet for what she called 'a count in my head', she walked home the Tramroad way. After the first 'count' she said: 'I've been spending fine,' though on second thoughts she found that she hadn't been in the least extravagant, for she still had a little more than half of bopa Lloyd's money left. 'No, I haven't wasted much.' The rent of their house in the Row was only fourteen shillings a month, and when her father and Will had been with her and working, she never touched a penny of the money bopa Lloyd left her. Joe she had spent the most on — and her father's funeral took a lot. But she didn't grudge that, didn't grudge him the handsome glass-panelled hearse, with two Belgian black horses wearing black plumes to pull it with her father in to the Cefn. He had the finest funeral money could buy. Moriah offered to help, but not likely. I can bury my own. Then there was the cab that she an' Moriah an' Shon an' Joe rode behind the hearse in — Will up in front with the driver. She could have let Moriah pay for the cab. Anyway, I didn't, so it's no good botherin' about that now. Some o' the neighbours still owed her money since the last strike, not a lot though, and if they

never pay I shan't cry. That strike of twenty-one weeks without a penny from anywhere – good job it didn't last longer. As it was, an' only lending a shilling or two at a time to the neighbours each side her, best part of a hundred pounds went that way before the old strike was over. But, thank God, I had it to lend, anyway. Had most of it back a bit at a time. It's now I'll have to be careful though. Nobody earning, for you can't call the bit Joe gets 'earning'. Takes all he gets to dress him. . . .

'The gel who cleans for Marged Ellis have been here for you,' said Susan, nursing her second baby, and she that way again. Laughing she had three months before told Megan: 'I'm in for it again.' 'Never,' Megan said, for the eldest of Susan's two children had only just started walking a bit. He was a heavy child, and Megan was all the time saying to Susan: 'Don't let him walk too soon to go bandy, an' p'raps have to get irons to straighten his little legs after.' And here was Susan going to have another baby. 'Are you sure?' said Megan. Susan laughed in her half-soaked way before saying: 'If I'm not sure, who is? We'll be a houseful soon. Good job my father went away to work with the sinkers.'

There was no keeping Susan to the point. One minute she'd be saying that she was in for it again, then the next she'd be talking about her father having gone off to work with the sinkers in some other district.

'What did the gel who cleans for Marged Ellis want?' Megan asked her.

'Wants you to go up. The bed have got Marged Ellis fast, she said.'

'Fast or not, I can't go up to her till after Joe comes home from the office,' said Megan, bending down to get the key of the door from under the stone.

The first thing she did was to make herself a cup o' tea, which she felt sinking for. So much happening in such a short time to make her have that sinking feeling. Her father being brought to her from the pit, a sodden, dirty-

grey corpse for Martha James to work on. Then the coming of Moriah, the funeral — only Joe to call her own now.

She poured herself some more tea, and sat, with her door shut, on the three-legged stool, sipping tea whilst looking into the fire. She was thinking that whilst mine are going one by one, Susan's are coming one by one to next door. Susan's father gone, but not to the grave. Gone to work with the sinkers who were sinking another pair of pits in — Megan couldn't remember which valley. Shon had told her that pits in pairs were being sunk in many valleys. As he went about he came across new townships which had grown around new pits here and there. Places growing around new pits, Shon had told her.

Growing places were, places growing, places changing. Merthyr was changing, that was easy to see. Growing and changing before her very eyes. More people — more everything. More water for one thing. The tap was seldom without water now. Then the old Cholera hadn't been to Merthyr since — since when? She tried to think. Anyway, it was a long time since the old Cholera was last sweeping Merthyr. Perhaps it had gone for good now. Gone for good. Yes, and now her father was gone for good after her mother. Them in America as good as gone for good. Yes, and Moriah, too. Only Joe to call her own now.

She stood up to start working herself free of the feeling of depression that was weighing her down. But in moving about the house she was all the time encountering her father. The arm-chair, his clay pipes, his clothes in the top big drawer of the chest-of-drawers. May as well let Will have his father's clothes, for they were much too old-fashioned for Joe. But Will would be glad of them. She made a big bundle of her father's clothes to cry over for a while before handing them over the wall to Susan.

Back to the house to stand looking around. When she saw her face in the looking-glass that was nailed above the mantelpiece she said: 'No good you cry all time.' No, she wouldn't cry any more. She would go up as far as the

farm for a quart of milk to make a big rice-pudding with a fresh egg in it for Joe, who liked her rice-puddings. Yes, and she would take Susan's eldest up as far as the farm with her to hear him try and say the names of the animals again. Already he could say 'gee-gee'. Cold it was, though, to take the child up the hill to the farm with her, and he was too heavy to carry back when she would have the jug of milk to carry as well. But she'd manage.

'Come on, Owen,' she cried over the wall, 'come with bopa up the farm to see the gee-gees an' moo-cows.' The child was delighted. Megan picked him up to carry him, and his weight in her arms lightened the weight which for a week had been making so heavy her heart. He prattled and pointed until he had made her forget the fatality and funeral of the week, and back from the farm she came with him, and a smile on her face.

When Joe came home from the office it was to find Megan fairly cheerful. 'I'm going up to see old Marged Ellis,' she said.

'With that shawl over your head again,' said Joe, frowning.

'I'm not asking you to wear it, so shut up, my boy,' she said, speaking like a granny to him. 'An' mind you're home in tidy time to go to your bed.'

Dai Balaclava was right, she thought, pulling the shawl closer around her as stepping out into the dark which from above was receiving late wet snow. With her head down she hurried up to the big old house by itself on the breast of the hill, 'the rise,' as some said, where the big old house, which bopa Lloyd left Marged Ellis with the other smaller houses, stood alone above two rows of back-to-back cottages about a hundred yards below. Walked straight in to say to the gel who cleaned for Marged Ellis two days a week: 'Snowing or raining or something again. Where is she with you?' 'Fast in bed she've been three weeks now -' 'Three weeks?' said Megan, shaking the wet off her shawl. 'I thought I hadn't seen her passing after her rent. But

I've been burying my father an' I don't know what all, so I haven't noticed much - where's your fire?' 'She,' said the girl, jerking a thumb upwards, 'said not to put more coal on after I gave her a cup o' tea.' 'Are you sleepin' here now?' 'No,' said the girl, 'but I comes every day now to look to her a bit. Come on up to her.' Upstairs they went to the room in which Marged Ellis was fast in bed, the same big old bed bopa Lloyd had for so long been fast in, an' Marged Ellis looking now like bopa Lloyd did then.

'Here's Megan, Marged Ellis,' said the girl.

The old woman in the bed half turned her head to ask querulously: 'Where have you been that you didn't come before?'

'I had to wait to put food for my Joe,' said Megan, speaking as though she were Joe's mother.

'I'll go home now, then, Marged Ellis,' said the girl, who was perhaps fourteen years old. 'Go for what good you are,' said the old woman. 'There's a lazy little bitch if you like,' gasped old Marged as the girl went. 'What can you say she does for the sixpence a day an' her food I'm paying her?' Megan didn't reply, but as far as she had been able to judge by candlelight below, and now in the upstairs room, the gel was doing plenty for the six pennies a day Marged Ellis grudged her. The place was much cleaner and tidier than ever Marged Ellis herself had kept it for old bopa Lloyd when she was alive.

'This old bed have had me fast three weeks now,' Marged Ellis was saying.

'Yes, so the gel told me.'

'Three weeks now - it'll be a month they'll owe next Monday. Drinking fine my rent-money they are no doubt.'

'I thought I hadn't seen you on your round, but I've been buryin' my - '

'In the Tydfil Arms an' the Glamorgan public-houses drinking my rent-money. But they'll pay, for I'll have the bum-bailiff to sell them up. Not one o' them tidy enough

to bring the bit o' rent with me fast in bed. Many of 'em owes rent since the last strike.'

'Have you had the doctor, Marged Ellis?'

'Don't want doctors. My legs it is, that's all, an' my breast a bit tight since the snow when I went after my bit o' rent - '

'Why don't you have the lawyer to fetch your rent same as he did for bopa Lloyd?'

'For him to rob me like he did her? No, my gel. Pounds an' pounds he made her pay for writing a bit on paper. Better do it now, he said to her. She was old - old. . . . But I looked out for you, didn't I? Looked out for you as well as myself. An' I'm not old. Not as old as she was, am I?'

'If it's bopa Lloyd you mean, no, you can't be near as old as she was. For she was nearly a hundred when she died.'

'There, there, didn't I tell you. Nearly a hundred she was when she died. So I'm - How much gone eighty am I?'

'P'raps not much. But what did you want me for?'

'You must take the book - there it is in the bag - to go after my rent for me.'

'Me?'

'Yes, you, Megan fach. You know where my houses are - an' I know you won't rob me.'

'Oh, it's no good you ask me, for I'm no scholar.'

'Then who, who'll I ask?' screeched the old woman.

'There, there, don't screech - '

'Who'll I ask - ' She stopped to cetch her breath, an' looking so pitiful a sight.

'All right,' said Megan. 'What I can't write Joe can. On Mondays you go round, isn't it?'

'Yes, Megan fach; an' remember now, that some of 'em haven't finished paying off the old since the strike. Four shillings for the week, an' a shilling off the old you must get off them - there's three like that down the Tramroad,

an' two over on the British Tip. A month they'll owe Monday, remember.' She closed her eyes as she fought for breath. 'There, I can sleep now that's off my heart....' And asleep she was.

Megan stood undecided at the bedside, looking down at the old woman, then at the black shopping bag in which the fat rent account book was. Joe would show her. She picked up the bag, which caused her to shiver as she did so. In the candlelight which was flickering from the little bedside table to dimly light the big room, Megan stood in fear and trembling of she knew not what. Decay, death not so long before, the silent house in which she was to leave the old woman alone, without a soul to call to. Why didn't she let the little gel stay there through the nights? P'raps she wouldn't stay. Better blow the candle out before going. She did, then she had the shivers worse. On tip-toes she fled.

Downstairs, out through the door which she remembered in her fear to close. Down the sidling road to the two rows of cottages, and on down to the main road where the lamps with gas aflame like sentinels stood about a hundred yards apart along the one side of the road only. Lamps like guardsmen glass-helmeted. Iron standards six-feet high with glass helmets, inside which the blue-white flame burnt like the heated spike of a helmet. Under one such lamp, the one below the drive leading to Penydarren House, but on the other side of the road, under that gas-lamp she stood trying to conquer her fear with the aid of familiar sights and sounds. The Merthyr-Dowlais bus passed all lit up, and cabs hansom and four-wheeler, carts with lamps right and left. Shops lit up, their light running out yellow to darken the bit of sleety snow outside. It was thicker on the ground now, so the clop-clop of horses' hooves came muted by it to Megan where she stood. People passing, the women and girls shawled, mittened, muffed. Another night from the past, and Moriah saying: 'I'm sure that I'll never look as awful as she looks....'

Now it was Marged Ellis that was lying there looking awful. An' p'raps I'll be the next lying there looking as awful all alone with nobody -

She ran, the rent account book from the bag she was carrying speaking with the voice of Marged Ellis. 'It'll be a month on Monday, remember - remember . . .'

The door of Will's house was open, the doorway full of warm lamplight, and it was into it she ran. 'Name o' God, what's the matter with you?' said Susan. 'I've - I've been running.' 'P'lliceman after you or what?' laughed Susan. 'No - but where's Will?' 'Working on, I expect.' 'I'll take this one in with me for a bit then,' said Megan, picking the eldest of the two children up off the floor. 'Take the two if you like,' said Susan. 'No, one's enough.' Looking into the face of the child she was holding she went on to ask: 'Susan, what would you say if I asked you to give me this one to live next door with me?'

Susan was lifting Will's taters an' meat out of the oven to put it with a plate over it on the hob, where the gravy wouldn't dry up so quick. Having attended to that she turned to face Megan unsmiling. 'For always, do you mean?' she said.

'Of course,' said Megan, tickling the child in her arms. 'I'm not joking,' she added.

'Neither am I joking,' said Susan coldly. 'You get your own children.'

Megan flushed up as she stooped to put the child back down on the floor beside his younger brother. 'You needn't be so short about it all the same. After all I've done for you.'

'Whatever you've done, you didn't bring either of these children for me. Nor shall you take either of 'em from me. You get your own.'

Megan turned to go. 'Listen,' said Susan. 'That's not to say that I'm against you having them for a bit now an' then.'

Megan sniffed angrily as she went out to go into her own

house, where she sulked until Joe came home later than usual. 'Where have you been till this time o' night?'

'I told you that I was going half-time to the Temperance Hall.'

'The Temperance Hall is out by ha'-past ten; now it's gone eleven.'

'I know, but I've been talking to Dai Daniel. Megan -'

'Here's your supper.'

'Thanks. Listen, Megan. How much have you left of the money old Aunt Lloyd left you? What are you smiling at?'

'At you with your "aunt". Bopa Lloyd, you mean.'

'As you like. I've got the chance of a lifetime - But tell me, how much of that money have you left?'

'Oh, I knows to the penny,' she said evasively.

'Then how much have you?'

'I haven't wasted any of it, if that's what you're thinking.'

Impatiently he said: 'Now, am I saying that you've been wasting your money? How much have you left in the bank? That's what I want to know.'

'But what do you want to know for?'

'Well, Dai Daniel, who's been doing most of old Field's work for years now -'

'Field the auctioneer, do you mean?'

Joe nodded. 'Dai Daniel is the one who has kept that business going for him. Now Dai's going to take chambers -'

'Chambers? Lodging, do you mean?'

Joe sighed audibly. 'No, chambers, offices really, but we shall call them chambers. Sounds better.'

'We? Who is we?'

'If you'll be good enough to listen, I'll tell you. Dai Daniel is willing to take me in with him. Davies and Daniel, auctioneers, valuers, accountants, etcetera, Cardiff.'

'Cardiff. Do you mean go to live down Cardiff?'

'Of course - but I shall be running up for week-ends.'

'That means that I shall have nobody then. Why can't you be a partner to somebody here in Merthyr?'

'Because Merthyr's going and Cardiff's coming. To-day Cardiff's bigger than Merthyr.'

'Never in this world.'

'I tell you it is.' He pointed at the butter-dish. 'Here we are stuck right up here out of everything, off the main line for London. If anything happened to the works and pits around here, where should we be? But down there in Cardiff they are getting the handling of what comes from a score of valleys. There they've got the docks, the shipping – everything. So the place is bound to grow and grow – Megan, you took me out of the pit to get me educated. What for? So that I should go on as I am in this place, listing and entering household furniture and effects? A few hundred pounds now and I should never look back.'

'Few hundred? How much is a *few* hundred pounds?'

'Well, anything from three to five hundred pounds.'

'H'm, the smallest few of the two is a lot o' money.'

'It depends on how much you've got.'

'It isn't much in all, Joe bach.'

'Oh, if that's your attitude. . . . I've got to know to-night whether you'll let me have a few hundred pounds to go in with Daniel. If you won't, then I shall write to ask Shon if he –'

'You'll do no such thing,' she fiercely said. 'Are we beggars? Finish your supper, an' go to bed when you're told.'

Joe went on eating, and over the cup of tea she was sipping, Megan asked a number of quite sensible questions, which Joe answered briefly. Then he went on to tell her of the play he had seen half of at the Temperance Hall. 'After Dark' was a good play, he assured her, and he advised her to go and see it before the week was out. Then he went upstairs to bed, whistling as he went.

After he had gone upstairs Megan fetched what she called 'the books of the bank' from under her downstairs flock

bed. She had 'a proper count'. After she had put the books of the bank back under the bed she banked the fire with damp small-coal. On the three-legged stool she sat afterwards for long, until well into the morning. It wasn't so much the money as him going, she said into the fire. Him going all that way to Cardiff. Nobody then she would have. Yet if she stopped him he would only be nasty all time perhaps. She had no doubt about his getting on, for she thought him cleverer in the head than that Dai Daniel, or anybody in Merthyr. Hadn't the man he had schoolin' with said that it was a pity her Joe couldn't go straight from him to some college?

Her legs stiff, and her head aching, she stood up off the three-legged stool, putting her hand to it as she got up not for it to topple over. 'He shall have not five, nor three, but four hundred of my money to try with,' she said to the three-legged stool. 'An' four hundred pounds is a lot of money, isn't it?'

'You watch, he won't come to-night again,' said Megan, more to herself than to the two standing far side of the low wall between the two houses. Will and Susan were waiting up with her for Joe to come home for the week-end from Cardiff, where for months now he had been one of the two partners of Daniel and Davies – not Davies and Daniel like he told Megan – who had what they called 'Chambers' over a grocer's shop in Cardiff, where they were getting a footing as auctioneers, accountants, valuers, rent-collectors, debt-collectors, and a few other things besides.

For the first month Joe came home to Megan every week-end. Then he missed a week-end. 'Getting busy,' he said. 'You don't work on Sunday,' Megan said. After that there was many a week-end when, as Susan put it, 'he couldn't find time to come and see the sister who had as good as reared him, an' put him on the high horse he was riding.'

Will said: 'I'll go over the bridge and out to the main road to be sure that the rodneys' train have come. For if he don't come with that you'll have no Joe to eat Sunday dinner with to-morrow again.'

Across the bridge he went to see if he could see anybody who had come with the rodneys' train from Cardiff. 'Rodney' in Merthyr means one who stays out late and lies abed late, one who doesn't go early to bed to rise early next morning to go to work. So the last train leaving Cardiff at eleven to reach Merthyr at midnight was called 'the rodneys' train', out of which it was often necessary to unload those who, in Cardiff, had drunk not wisely but too well.

'Megan,' said Susan, now flat as a pancake again after having brought her third baby, 'that boy Joe's got too much starch, too much collar an'—'

'P'raps you'd like him to sit in his office, an' go about Cardiff on business, wearing a dirty old muffler like that Will of yours always do?'

'Will's mufflers may be old, but never dirty,' said Susan. 'You're getting very snappy, Megan, an' it's you that have rose Joe's sleeve. An' this,' she said, waving a hand into the quietude of the first hour of the Sabbath, 'this is your thanks. If ever I'm so dull as to make more o' one o' mine than of the others, then I'll expect what you're getting from your Joe.'

Will waited on the corner, tired after his week's work down the pit, and drowsy after the few pints o' beer he had most Saturday evenings. 'Thank God for Sunday,' he yawned, then went on to anticipate the joys and blessings of the Sabbath already running. The one most glorious long sleep of the week in front of him — but he would awake at five o'clock, couldn't help it. No five o'clock hooter on Sundays, but he would wake up just the same, wake up to say aloud: 'But it's Sunday, you fathead,' before sleep like a river would bear him away. About nine o'clock Susan — good old Susan — would be

at his bedside with a cup o' tea. 'I didn't hear you getting up,' he would say as he took the cup o' tea to drink. 'Why, do you ever hear me getting up?' He never did, for she got up from his side every morning to get everything ready before waking him — good old Susan.

After the cup of tea he would spread-eagle himself under the bedclothes to sleep until nearly dinner-time, for he seldom went to chapel on Sunday morning. Sunday, Sunday, when bells not hooters, bells, sweet bells of the Cefn ring me here to sleep in big bed all to myself. Bell-ringers have gagged all works and pit hooters before pulling the bells whose tongues in the morning they say go to sleep — sleep, Will sleep....

'Eh?'

'Nearly dinner-time,' Susan is saying. 'Get up an' give yourself a bit of a swill before sitting down to dinner.' This is not the taters an' meat he gollups alone late each evening of the week after twelve hours an' more down the pit, but Sunday dinner, to which we all sit down together. Me, Susan, an' the children. Grand. No hurry, take your time. A bottle of herb-beer, for though he likes his pint, Sunday is Sunday, an' there's a week to drink beer in. After dinner, weather permitting, Susan will send him for a bit of a walk with the children whilst she cleans up after dinner, then cleans herself after before changing out of her working-clothes and into her bit o' best. With the baby in the shawl which goes right around him and the baby, and the other two toddling best they can one each side him, he goes next door to Megan's, for her to see the children in their bit o' best before he goes up as far as the Twmp, or the Workhouse Tip, to look down and out on the town, and talk to the other men up there with babies in shawls and their other children running about. The men they twt down smoking their clay pipes away from babies' faces. Their Sunday pipes they smoke, not the blackened cutties they smoke to and fro the pit morning and evening during the week. The men they don't talk

much, they just loosen-up, expand, relax, get to feel good generally.

— Many of the men of the place are about this time stuck in the pubs, worse luck. Twice each Sunday they drink their senses and money away in the pubs — but not Will, ‘thank God’, said Susan. Back home to tea, to which they all sit down together. This day, being as Joe haven’t come home from Cardiff, tea with Megan, or Megan have tea with us. Just as good any way. After tea get ready for chapel, where sometimes the preacher or the singing or both would make the baby cry something awful, and Susan — poor old Susan — would have to get up and take the baby out and try and get him to sleep so as she could get back to hear the sermon. After chapel, home through the crowded street, Will carrying one of the toddlers, Megan carrying the other.

Put the children to bed before we have a bit o’ supper. After supper a bit of a chat over the wall with Megan; if wet, then in her house or our house. ‘Yes,’ said Will again, ‘thank God for Sunday.’

He returned alone to where Megan waited with Susan for company. ‘No?’ said Megan. ‘No,’ said Will. ‘There was a lot came on the rodneys’ train, but Joe wasn’t one of ‘em.’

‘Pity we waited up,’ said Susan.

‘He can stay in Cardiff,’ said Megan, nearly crying. ‘I’ll have company. I’ll have Sophie Morris to live with me for company, I will. You wait.’

On the Monday morning she received from Joe the by now familiar letter of apology. ‘It’s little I’ll see of him from now on,’ she muttered. ‘If he says anything about me having Sophie to live with me I’ll tell him to mind his own business.’

She finished her bit o’ cleaning out by ten, then she dressed to go down to see Sophie. Down through the main street she went to stop outside the railings of the St. David’s School playground, which was crowded with children play-

ing. ‘The old church school,’ was how she had often heard her father now dead scornfully refer to it. With her hands gripping the two iron railings between which her head was wedged, Megan thought that whatever it is, ‘old church’ or all English and no Welsh school, it was grand for the children she could see playing. Hundreds of children playing, shouting, laughing. . . . As the eldest of them, those near twelve years old, passed to and fro, Megan said in her mind: ‘Yes, my boys, you’re lucky, for all the boys from our house was down the pit long before they was your age,’ or: ‘yes, my gel, you’re lucky, me an’ our Moriah was working in the brickyard long before we was your age.’ ‘Schoolin’,’ she murmured aloud, ‘a grand thing to have schoolin’ an’ to be let play a bit before being put to work.’

She stood there watching, with her head between two railings of iron until the children were with hand-bells recalled to their lessons. Playground deserted now. Silent. Now the noises of the street behind her back came to her ears to turn her about. The bus, cabs, carts, hand-trucks drawn by men, between them filling the road, pedestrians filling the pavements. Workmen knocking three little shops down to build one big shop in the place of them. Things changing, people growing older, growing older like Sophie, who now kept herself out of the Workhouse by going out to work in people’s houses. Sophie had failed to keep the pan going in the brickyard, now she was washing and cleaning for people who could afford to pay her a shilling a day and her food. Megan hurried, for after talking to Sophie, there was Marged Ellis’s rent to collect, and that took her best part of every Monday.

Oh, the job she had to make Sophie agree to come and live with her for always. ‘I want nobody’s charity,’ she nearly drove Megan wild by saying. ‘What charity are you talking about? I’ve got the bit o’ money, but no company. I’m by myself up there, you’re by yourself down here. You goes out cleaning for other people – well, you shall clean for me instead. An’ live-in, see, Sophie,

like the gels in the Temple o' Fashion.' Sophie smiled a little. 'Your few things - h'm. Yes, p'raps we can make room for some of 'em.'

'I haven't said that I'm coming to live with you.'

'But you will. Gel, we'll be company one for the other.'

'What company will an old woman be for a young gel like you?'

'Don't talk so dull, Sophie. You're not old, an' I'm not so young. What good the old money if - Listen, I've got - not counting what Joe owes me, over - but never mind, plenty for you an' me. Then we'll be saving the rent of one house, that's four shillings a week now. You won't eat much more'n four-shillings worth o' food a week. So what charity now, then? You can look after the house for me whilst I'm out collecting rent for Marged Ellis - an' p'raps when she's better she'll give me something for going round for her all these months. Better up there where I live than down here on the Tramroad, Sophie. When the sports are in the Big Field you can hear the Cyfarthfa Band playing there from our doorstep - an' this year coming the National Eisteddfod is coming to the Big Field for nearly a week, an' you can't say you don't like singing. Remember how you made us gels sing every dinner-time up there in the brickyard? Of course you do. Laughing or crying you are?'

A bit o' both by the shape of Sophie's lined face, who was as hungry, more hungry for a bit o' company than Megan was. For Sophie hadn't had anybody all the years since her boy without a father to turn to was taken with the others by the second Gethin explosion. Pressing the fingers of her left hand one at a time, she looked around her little house. It was one of the little houses along the Tramroad which were below the embankment of the Plymouth pits house-coal railway line. If Sophie stood in her doorway when the engine and trucks were passing by she felt like if the engine and trucks were passing over her head. She had to go down steep stone steps off the

railway line down into her house, the one little living-room of which was always too dark for her to sew without a candle, for the one little window was within a foot of the railway embankment. The embankment which was made of pit-refuse often loosened when the engine and trucks passed over, then some of the refuse would tumble down off the embankment and into Sophie's house if the door happened to be open. The houses on the other side of the railway line that was laid along what was called 'The Tramroad' were better for the reason that they were, the doorsteps of them, on a level with the railway line.

So Sophie's little house with the top of the door-frame only about a foot away from the railway embankment was not, when all's said and done, much to grieve over leaving. Yet she found it hard to say good-bye to it now that Megan was pressing her. 'Say yes,' said Megan again. 'Say yes, Sophie.'

'All right,' Sophie said at last.

CHAPTER XIII

WOMBWELL'S MENAGERIE: THEN THE NATIONAL EISTEDDFOD

As she went up the hill with the ounce o' 'bacco in her hand, Megan again thought that the Workhouse looked from the front like a church. Iron railings like in front of St. David's Church facing the main street below, and long windows like church windows the Workhouse had, too. She had been to 'send' Joe as far as the station after he had spent the week-end with her at last. But she didn't reproach him, for she was too surprised to when he passed her his cheque for the four hundred pounds she had set him up in Cardiff with little over a year previous.

'Never,' she gasped, after looking twice at the cheque to make sure.

'It's all right,' said Joe airily.

'Well, well, well, well.... Money like dirt there must be down Cardiff.'

'Oh, no, it has to be worked for. Still, it's there to be made.'

Joe wrinkled his nose at Sophie about the house this time again, but he didn't say anything about her being there this time. Wouldn't pay him to, was what Megan was thinking. Monday morning came, and down the street to the station they went together, calling in at the bank to pay the cheque in to Megan's account. 'This boy o' mine's getting on, don't you think, Mr. Price,' said Megan to the bank cashier. 'You're right, Miss Davies,' said the cashier, looking enviously out at Joe through brass railings. Joe, dressed like a gentleman, carrying a walking stick and wearing gloves on his hands, dressed in a way that

made Megan ashamed to put anything less than her bit o' best on to go to 'send' him as far as the station.

On the station platform she said: 'It'll be months before I see you again, no doubt?' 'It all depends,' he said. 'Now that we're property agents – but why don't you run down to Cardiff some Thursday afternoon. I could take you to the Theatre Royal.'

'Yes, p'raps me an' Sophie will –'

'No, no, no,' he hurriedly said. 'Don't bring her with you.'

Megan stood biting her lower-lip for a bit before saying: 'You haven't been a-willing that Sophie's living with me from the start.'

'It's nothing to do with me, my dear Megan.'

'All the same, you're not a-willing. But it's little you know. Sophie was the best friend me an' your sister Moriah had; an' no doubt she'll wrinkle her nose same as you, but she'll never have a better friend than Sophie was to the two of us when we was little gels in the brick-yard.'

'I'd better find myself a seat,' said Joe.

'If you,' said Megan, following him down the platform, 'are lucky enough to find such a good friend down Cardiff –'

'Ah, here's a corner-seat; a smoker, too.' In he got to stand leaning out of the window. She forgot about Sophie looking at him so handsome with his hat off, his hair so lovely, his moustache so wavy. Her 'boy' as she called him was twenty-three next birthday, and he would never be her 'boy' any more, she now sadly realised. That 'my dear Megan' of his was the fence he had erected between the 'Joe bach' that was, and the Joseph Davies of the firm of Daniel and Davies. They're little boys one minute an' they're men talking big the next, she was thinking as he went on talking about himself and his future plans. 'Good-bye,' he said, lowering his head to touch her cheek indifferently with his lips as the guard waved his flag – an' he was gone again.

She had Marged Ellis's rent to gather, but she would do that this afternoon after dinner. She had a busy day ahead of her, for she had promised to take Sophie an' that eldest boy of Susan's to the menagerie this evening – an' she may as well take old Bridget Murphy the ounce o' 'bacco now as to-morrow, for she had choir practice to-morrow evening, an' things to do in the day as well. They didn't let everybody in to the Workhouse this time o' day, but with Dai Balaclava at the gate, an' the Master's wife she didn't mind Megan coming any time.

'Hullo, Dai,' she said as passing him near the gates.

'Here, what time o' day is this to come through these gates like if you owned the place?' said Dai Balaclava.

'Hadn't you better be civil, Dai?' she said meaningly.

'I was only joking, gel,' he hastened to say, remembering the price of many a pint. 'But if it's old mother Murphy you've come to see, than there's one before you waiting to see her.'

'Who?'

'I don't know. Some gentleman wearing a box-hat, you'll see him in the waiting-room. The Master's wife said she'll come to him when she's ready.'

The 'gentleman', as Dai Balaclava called him, was, when Megan quietly entered the waiting-room, stood tall with his hands behind him, and in one hand he had a box-hat. On two fingers of his other hand there were gold rings. He stood looking out through the window on to the yard, where a number of the male inmates had gathered around Sam Sebastopol to look in at the man as though he were part of a peeping-show arranged for their pleasure. Snorting impatiently, the 'gentleman' turned his back on those in the yard outside, so he was bound to see Megan. He bowed slightly, and said: 'Good day to you.'

A heavy gold chain he had across his middle from one waistcoat pocket to the other. He stood with long straight legs well apart looking down on Megan, who said: 'Don't I know you?'

He smiled a little. 'Quite possible. My name's Murphy.'

'Of course. Tim Murphy. I wasn't quite sure of you with that big moustache, an' fat you've got. You know me, don't you?'

He looked at her, then shook his head. 'I'm afraid —' 'Why, don't you remember my brother Sam who was married to your sister Eileen?'

Holding his hand out he said: 'Ah, yes, didn't I cross to America with two other brothers of yours?'

'Yes, Llew' an' Lias. How are they out there?'

'Indeed, I couldn't tell you. The last I saw of them was the day we got off the boat at New York. Didn't they say they were going to Scranton?'

'Yes, that's where they are. Not there you are?'

'No, Chicago, that's where I live.'

'Working in the works there? or in the pits?'

He laughed shortly. 'No, I'm in business with me uncle. In America we Irish leave the pits to the Welsh and the Poles, and we leave the works for the rest of the foreigners to sweat in.'

'An' you've come back to see your mother, have you?'

'Yes, and to take her out of this Union, where she never ought to be. As soon as I heard about it — that drunken sow of a sister of mine,' he exploded, then pulled himself up to say: 'I'm sorry. It's me mother being in this place.'

'Well, isn't she better off here than living by herself in Company Row now your poor father's gone? My father's gone, too.'

He murmured sympathetically.

'A bit o' 'bacco I brings for your mother every week. She likes her pipe, an' she likes the place all right, too. She's like the boss of the other old women in here.'

'You wanted to see Mrs. Murphy?' said the Master's wife as she entered. 'Hullo, Megan. This way, please,' she said, leading the way out of the waiting-room.

Megan waited whilst Bridget Murphy surprised her son

Timothy by refusing to leave the place with him there and then – or ever. Said she was content to be where she was, and nothing that he could think of to say could move her from where she was. She would like him to see a man about putting a bit of a stone at the head of his father's grave away up there in the Cefn – 'an' tell the man to leave room for my name below your father's on the stone.' Yes, he could do that. She was glad to learn that he was doing so well in America. Perhaps he would leave with the priest, who came often to see her, money for masses to be said, and money for the burying of herself decent where his dad was now lying. The big American-Irishman found himself at a loss for words in front of a little old woman content to end her days in what she called 'the Union', others said 'the Workhouse'. He, Timothy Murphy, of Chicago, Illinois, with gold rings on his fingers, a heavy gold chain across his middle from one waistcoat pocket to the other, a handful of gold sovereigns in one pocket, and a bigger handful of silver in the other, heavy with gold and silver the heavy man stood helpless in front of the stubborn old woman his mother. In her clay pipe she was trying a pipeful of his American tobacco, which she said was not so much to her taste as the Ringer's Shag Megan and others brought her plenty of.

'Come an' see me friends in the place, Tim,' she said, leading the way out to where a number of old women were seated and standing. 'This is me son in America,' Bridget said, and one by one the old women came close to look up into his face and smile toothlessly. 'Haven't we met before?' said the one they called 'Lady Lewis', haughtily. Some of the old women were crippled with rheumatic, others pitted with small-pox holes, others half-paralysed, dragging their legs, hanging limp their arms and some laid clammy hands on his big hot-blooded one, fondling it as they said: 'Fine boy you've got, Bridget.'

Their clammy hands on his, their eyes like moths in mist roving over him, and as though measuring him for his

coffin, he felt. Why hadn't he written, why wouldn't she his mother let him take her out o' this – this – this place heavy in the shadow of death. . . . A last appeal, to which she replied by pointing to those she called 'me friends'. Backwards he went out with her blessing, a cold sweat on his brow, his eyes on the calm and collected old woman his mother, standing in the midst like an Irish queen, around her the old and wise, the old and foolish, all around her dependent. The group seen through the mist of tears as he backed away he was never to forget. Standing alone, some little distance from the group around his mother, was the one called 'Lady Lewis', bowing elaborately with her half-mad smile directed after him. Mother o' mine, good-bye, mother o' . . .

'My mother –' He gulped hard a few times. 'My mother,' he said to the wife of the Master of the place, 'must never want for anything – but I'll talk to the priest. . . . Yes, I'll go to see the priest – I'm obliged to you.' With his hat in his hand he rushed out of the waiting-room and past Dai Balaclava at the gate like if Satan was at his heels. Megan she looked after him with eyes full of surprise. Bridget told Megan, when she went out to the yard to her with the bit o' 'bacco, what had caused her son to leave as he did. 'Poor fellow bach,' was all Megan said before going on to tell Bridget: 'I'm going to a wild beast show to-night.' That started Bridget telling of a circus she had seen in Ireland when a gel. From all over the county people came to it, she said; and all the old women gathered round close to listen, whilst the one they called 'Lady Lewis', like a sentry before a palace in which a queen was holding a court, walked stiffly to and fro from one high wall of the yard to the other.

'Grand, no doubt,' said Megan. 'I must go home to my dinner, for the dinner-bell will soon be going here.' Off she went as happy as could be to have dinner with Sophie. After dinner she had to hurry around after Marged Ellis's rent, then take it up to the house to her before hurrying

home for a late tea, and to get ready for to go to the wild beast show.

'Pity Susan from next door couldn't come as well,' said Sophie.

'Her an' Will shall go together after he comes from work,' said Megan. 'For it's on more'n once.'

'Yes, I'll mind the children for her to go,' said Sophie.

'Come on,' said Megan, taking little Owen's hand. The boy he toddled across the bridge and out on to the main road between Megan and Sophie. People hurrying in all directions to turn left and right into Penydarren Park. No wonder the people were flocking there after the way the district had been plastered with posters, most exciting posters, for weeks now. Then that very day after the animals had arrived in closed cages, a man perched high up on an elephant's forehead had been showering handbills down on the people in the street; and many boys after reading their handbills rolled them into little balls to give the elephant like pills when his trunk came their way. The elephant put hundreds of paper pills out of sight before he at last lost his taste for them. He was a huge, dirty elephant with mud caked in the cracks of his hide like mortar between the stones of a wall. No doubt that elephant worked very hard pulling wagons axle-deep in sludge out on to the firm ground for the horses to get hold of them. To most of the boys in the town he, the elephant – that's if he was a he – was the wild beast show. He was on show free of charge – no thanks to them who owned the show – for he was too big to hide out of sight in the tent where the other animals was hid out of sight. All the boys with no money to go in got of them animals was their growls. But the elephant – fair play for him – walked the streets like any one of us without fuss, and as though grateful for the paper pills the boys made out of the handbills for him after contents noted, as some say.

So the boys with no money to go in had to use their

imagination, and relate the elephant in motion before their eyes to the posters on the hoardings. Those huge posters showed every animal living wild in the world. Some of them, from high up in trees – around which huge snakes had coiled themselves – looked down on the lions and tigers on the ground below killing the animals made for eating. The monkeys of all shapes and sizes, safe up in the trees, seemed to be enjoying the sight of the lions and tigers tearing up harmless animals. But there were a great variety of animals on the painted floor of the poster running for their lives from where the lions and tigers were killing with tooth and claw. From a swamp on the poster, huge animals dripping sludge looked with heavy disapproval at the killing in the foreground.

That's not half what was on the poster altogether. Then there was another poster with 'WOMBWELL'S MAMMOTH MENAGERIE' across the top in big letters, and along the bottom in smaller letters it said: 'World's Greatest Array of Wild Animals.' Between the lettering top and bottom, lions and tigers flying through the air with their teeth showing, and in the middle of 'em all there was a uniformed man looking as bold as could be. There were other picture posters too that showed a woman in a cage with lions – but them who paid to go in said when they came out that they didn't see any woman only the woman they gave the money to as they went in. P'raps the woman who was supposed to go in to the lions like on the poster was bad in bed or something.

Megan and Sophie and Will's eldest little boy, Owen, had a job to get in if you like. Many who had only come to listen to the band playing were in the way of people wanting to pay to get in. However, Megan, Sophie and the boy managed to get in at last. 'There's no place to sit,' said Sophie. There wasn't either, all had to stand or keep walking round, but what use talk about walking round when the place was crammed-jammed long before Megan, Sophie and the boy got in. So Megan had to

pick the boy up and hold him in her arms not for him to be trod under feet.

The cages on wheels with the animals in had been placed in a large circle, in which the audience now stood jammed, some few pushing their way around to look closely at the animals in their cages with more room to move about in than the human beings viewing them had. From the top of the strong wooden poles inside the circle of wagons stretched canvas down-sloped to be pegged down outside the circle of wagons. The show was stood inside the track which, when sports were held in the Park, the quarter-mile was run.

Megan carrying the boy, with Sophie behind her, had a stiff job pushing their way forward to face the lions in their cage. 'We'll stay by here - never mind them other animals - for it's into these the man will be going when he comes,' said Megan. 'They look quiet enough, God help 'em,' said Sophie, looking at the lions, four of them. Two lying down asleep, the other two on their legs looking with reproach in their eyes out through the bars of their cage at the people.

From a row of naphtha lamps high above the people's heads, hanging down from wooden stretchers between the pole-tops, light seemed to flow down - 'is it the lamps I can smell?' said Sophie. 'The lamps an' these in the cages, no doubt,' said Megan.

Then two uniformed attendants came crying 'make way' from somewhere. A negro and a white man making for the lions' cage, the negro carrying a flaming torch, the white man a pole. All the people turned to face the lions now. The two lions sleeping were made to stand up by the prodding they received from the man who thrust the pole into their ribs. The negro he shouted and made sparks fly from the flaming torch by drawing it to and fro the bars of the cage. The lions first yawned, then they growled their annoyance at being disturbed to receive the tamer thrillingly.

He came in a much finer uniform than those the attendants wore, in one hand a whip, in the other a revolver. The people gulped breath as he quickly let himself in to the lions and closed the gate of the cage clangingly behind him. Now that he was in the attendants stopped shouting. Almost breathless the people watched the tamer making the lions do tricks one after the other. The lion he stooped down to pick up and carry like a sack of flour across his shoulders was the smallest of the four, and the quietest as well. The others he made jump through a hoop, and stand with their front feet up on a tub turned upside-down. He cracked his whip from time to time, but he didn't fire his revolver.

After making the lions do a number of tricks he backed his way towards the gate of the cage with the lions following him. Outside the two attendants ready with blazing torch and wooden pole. Like lightning the tamer lets himself out as the lions they line the bars growling. The lion-tamer now on a level with the audience smiles and bows, and a man near the entrance is shouting 'this way out, this way out.' As going out Sophie said: 'Give me the theatre before that sort o' show any day.' 'Me, too,' said Megan. 'For we can sit down for one thing in the theatre.' They, Sophie and Megan, and Susan and the children, were regular patrons of the little wooden theatre on the Tramroad.

Sophie and Susan and the children had to go to the theatre on the Tramroad, and everywhere else except chapel, without Megan for months and months. For Megan was all the time practising with the Merthyr Harmonic Society, which was to give Dr. Parry's *Emmanuel* at the National Eisteddfod which was to be held in Merthyr this year. Lewis Morgan was the conductor of the Merthyr Harmonic Society, and he picked on Megan to sing the solos in the practices, the solos that the famous soprano, Mary Davies, was coming from where she lived

in London to sing on the night of the performance. Until then Lewis Morgan, the conductor who was getting the Merthyr Harmonic Society ready, had to pick some of the choir to sing the solos during the practices which started with him saying: 'We'll go right through the book without stopping to-night.' Megan it was that had to sing the soprano solos. 'The book,' as Lewis Morgan, the conductor, called it, was what stopped Megan from going to places with Sophie and Susan and the children. The music of the 'book' she hadn't much trouble with, for it was a Sol-fa copy she used – and she was pretty good with Sol-fa by this time. But the words, the long words, that she had to sing by herself in front of all the others of that big choir. It was the words that made her stay in at nights to practise saying them to herself. Long words to be sung in choruses with about a hundred others are one thing, long words to be sung by one's self with that other hundred with their ears cocked to listen – see the difference? Especially with many of the other sopranos as jealous as could be because it was she Lewis Morgan picked on for the solo work during the months and months of practise. Some nights she would not sing any of the solos, for there were nights when Lewis Morgan would concentrate on one – two at most – of the big choruses.

This was the first time for 'the National', as people called the greatest Welsh Eisteddfod, to come to Merthyr, and Lewis Morgan, the conductor, wanted the Merthyr Harmonic Society to impress the thousands of Welsh people expected from all over Wales and the world. It was a Merthyr composer's work that he, Lewis Morgan, was going to conduct – 'a Merthyr man's work for Merthyr singers to sing,' he said to the choir assembled for practice more than once. Then he wanted what he called 'my choir', meaning the Merthyr Harmonic Society, to do better than what he referred to as 'that choir from over the mountain', meaning the Rhymney and Pontlottyn United Choir. In choral work Merthyr could point back

to Moses Davies and further, but as for Rhymney over the mountain – well, compared to Merthyr, they were new-comers in the choral world.

Rhymney is the top-end township of the Rhymney valley, the next valley as you go over the top from Merthyr. Quite close to us – but what a difference. Rhymney hadn't our background, our – well, anything. It had some good voices though, and in John Price – fair play for him – a young conductor who was making his mark. Rhymney as a town was Company owned and controlled more so than any of our top-end coal and iron towns, of which Merthyr was by far the greatest. All the Rhymney people could call their very own were their souls and their voices. The Company, the Rhymney Iron and Coal Company, owned the rest. Owned them from afar, so to speak, for the head offices of the Company were in London. None of the owners lived in Rhymney, didn't even live in Wales. But they owned Rhymney all the same. Owned all the iron-works, the pits, most of the houses, all the public-houses, the Rhymney Brewery to brew beer for their public-houses, and the Company shop they owned as well. But the chapels they did not own. So when the people were assembled in their chapels they were, so to speak, in a 'free house', the house of God. And whatever good thing came out of Rhymney came out of God's 'free houses', where 'Mammon', as they call him, had no abiding place. Of course, the top-ends of all the valleys were owned and controlled in much the same way as Rhymney at the top-end of the Rhymney valley was. Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo, Blaenavon – but the Rhymney Iron and Coal Company was the only one of the iron and coal companies to establish a brewery close to the works.

Anyway, the Rhymney and Pontlottyn United Choir, which was made up of chapel choirs, was coming over to Merthyr National Eisteddfod to perform – assisted by E. G. Woodward's orchestra, and several eminent artistes – the oratorio, *David and Saul*, specially composed for the

Merthyr 'National' by David Jenkins, Mus. Bac. (Cantab.). He, David Jenkins himself, was to conduct this performance of his own work. Then why wasn't Dr. Parry, who had taught David Jenkins nearly all David Jenkins knew, allowed to conduct *his* own work? That's what the row was about. There were those who took it upon themselves to invite Dr. Parry over to Merthyr one night to hear for himself what a mess — as they said — Lewis Morgan was making of his oratorio, *Emmanuel*. Having listened to the choir practising under Lewis Morgan, Dr. Parry left with those who had brought him there. 'Now that you've heard what he's doing to your work,' they said to Dr. Parry, 'you can well imagine what'll be done to it the evening of the performance, when he' — Lewis Morgan, poor fellow bach — 'will have an orchestra and those artistes from London to conduct as well. What can we do about it? If David Jenkins is entitled to conduct his own work, then surely you, bred and born in the place, are entitled to conduct the work which nobody can possibly know as well as you that composed it? You're a doctor of music, a famous composer and conductor. What's Lewis Morgan? A bit of a local conductor, that's all.'

But whatever Lewis Morgan was, he would have to conduct on the evening of the performance. More, the choir would have none other than Lewis Morgan to stand before them with a baton in his hand. A lot of under-handed work, the members of the choir said, had been going on. People bringing Dr. Parry to Merthyr on the sly — 'after Lewis Morgan have been practising us all these months they want him to hand over to Dr. Parry,' said Megan indignantly to Sophie, who had to hear it all. Megan was all for Lewis Morgan, who had picked on her out of all them other sopranos to sing the soprano solos in practice. 'It's all very well for them to talk about *Emmanuel* being Dr. Parry's own work, Sophie, but that's not saying he'll conduct better than Lewis Morgan — or half as good. When Lewis Morgan took us from

Merthyr that time up to London to sing them pieces under Caradog in the Cor Mawr that beat the English, we didn't have them who made the pieces we sung to conduct us, did we?' Sophie said: 'You knows, my gel.' 'Of course I knows, for wasn't I singing in the Crystal Palace?' 'Did I say different?' asked Sophie. 'I'm not saying you did,' said Megan. 'But what I'm saying is that if Caradog could conduct them other men's pieces, an' make us win easy like he did, then Lewis Morgan can conduct us through this book of Dr. Parry's same as Caradog – But I know what it is, Sophie. It's them – an' don't I know 'em – on the committee of the Eisteddfod that thinks only doctors an' professors an' people that have had schoolin' can sing an' conduct. But you wait....'

'I'm getting a two-shilling ticket apiece for you, Will, an' Sophie to come to the Eisteddfod the night our choir is singing,' said Megan over the wall to Susan.

'But if Sophie's going as well, how about the children?' said Susan, now the mother of four boys. Owen, David, Morgan, and Shon was what she had named the baby.

'Little Annie Rowlands will mind 'em, she's as good as gold with children, for a couple of coppers. Maria, her mother, will be in an' out as well. You an' Will must come, for there'll be thousands there. The Cyfarthfa Band is playing as well the night we're singing, so there'll be all Merthyr there, an' thousands from away as well.'

There were, and amongst those from away, Shon and Moriah. 'Well, well, well, well,' said Megan when she saw them. But Joe didn't trouble to come up from Cardiff, for down there in Cardiff, Megan said: 'they haven't got much looks on our National Eisteddfod, for they're nearly all English down Cardiff, an' our Joe is not much better than English now since he's been with 'em down there.' But wasn't Megan glad – though she took good care not to show that she was glad – that Moriah had been able to come after all. The opera company with

which she was to appear on the bills as Madame Moriana, was not starting to sing through the winter till the Monday following, so she came with Shon and some of the principals of the opera company, and they was all staying in the Castle Hotel together. Shon said that he might stay all the winter in Merthyr now that strikes were a thing of the past since the Sliding-scale agreement was operating. 'For you can't beat Merthyr for business when things are going well.'

He was sitting in the arm-chair talking, but Moriah she sat near the door fanning herself, listening to Shon talking about his Cheap Jack's business like if it gave her a pain to hear it. Outside, what Megan called 'one o' them open cabs', was waiting. 'Aren't these flies awful?' she sighed, Moriah, not Megan. With her fan she screened a yawn, after which she said to change the conversation from the business she looked down on to anything but that: 'I think Eisteddfods too dreary for words, but I thought Parrelli and some of the others would be amused to hear what goes on at one of them.'

Megan began to boil inside. 'That's you, all over, my fine lady,' she said to herself. 'You'd better draw it mild before I say something in front of Shon that you won't like.' But she couldn't resist saying out aloud. 'Dreary or not, I expect you'd be glad o' the chance to come an' sing here at this Eisteddfod.'

'My dear girl —' She fanned herself awhile before she went on to say: 'I didn't study for seven years to sing at Eisteddfods. Not for a thousand pounds a concert would I sing at this year's at Merthyr, where Shon's so well known for what he is.'

'Arglywydd mawr,' cried Megan, jumping up. 'You — "For what he is," is it, my gel? If it wasn't for what he is you wouldn't be what you are — an' not much you are at that.' She pointed to Sophie sitting quiet. 'Take a good look at her, my gel.'

'Megan, don't be absurd,' Moriah said evenly.

'Take a good look at her, I said. Do you remember where you first met her, my fine lady?'

'Come, Shon,' said Moriah, standing up to pick her dress up first, then sailing majestically out to the open cab. 'Don't take any notice of her, Megan fach,' whispered Shon as going out to her, 'it's only her old way.'

'An' your old way with her, you softie, you froice. . . .'

He was gone to open a sunshade over Moriah, who sat in the open cab like a woman sitting in a cab on the stage for people to notice her. She wrinkled her nose at the women of the Row on their doorsteps – or perhaps it was the all too human smell of the Row at the end of this hot and dry summer. Big families in small houses can't help smelling a bit in the summer. Megan through the window watched Moriah sitting like a queen in the open cab in front of all the women in the Row. 'To the Castle Hotel,' Megan muttered. 'For two pins I'd go out there an' turn her over to beat her behind like I used to.'

'She's a bit big for that now,' said Sophie placidly.

'Before she'd been in the house a minute – There, she's made me I'll never be able to sing to-night. What – what do you think of her?'

'She's a lot stouter than she was,' said Sophie.

'Stou – She's getting I can hardly keep my hands off her – There she goes in her open cab over the bridge. Wave your fan, my fine lady. There, she's gone, an' I don't care if she never comes back. The flies were awful, our National Eisteddfod was – An' you sit there trying to cloak it all by saying that she's stouter.'

'Sisters you are when all's said an' done.'

'Do she talk like a sister? behave like a sister? No, she don't. Indeed to my God, I'd rather see a bum-bailiff come in to my house than her.'

'Oh no, you wouldn't,' said Sophie.

Megan sat limp in the chair near the open doorway, the chair in which Moriah had sat fanning herself, looking out. 'She could have stayed for the cup o' tea you put so tidy.'

'She'll be here before the night's out.'

Susan with little Shon in her arms came round the wall to say: 'Your Moriah looked grand. I thought she was coming in to see me an' the children. Flustered myself tidying the place....'

Moriah was there long before the night was out, as Sophie had said. Came when Megan was getting herself ready, came with tears in her eyes to apologise and help Megan to get ready to look nice amongst the sopranos all in white. 'It's my old temper it was, not yours,' said Megan, willing to take the blame now that Moriah was something like. 'No, it's my unfortunate manner, my dear,' said Moriah, talking like Joe had gone to talk.

'Leave her to me,' said Sophie jealously to Moriah. 'I'll finish dress her - you go next door to see your brother an' his wife.'

'Yes, go in, Moriah, for Susan was hoping -'

'I'm going,' said Moriah.

'Oh,' cried Susan as Moriah sailed in to find her brother Will naked in the tub, standing in it to wash the coal-dust off his legs. Susan tried to screen him from Moriah's sight, but Will he grinned over his shoulder and said: 'Hullo, Moriah. Excuse my back parts. Don't be silly, Susan,' he said, laughing. 'This is not the first time for Moriah to see me naked in the tub.'

Susan dusted a chair for Moriah, at whom the children stared. Moriah smiled at them, but they didn't smile back. 'It's your bopa Moriah, you little sillies,' said Susan.

'You're looking well, Moriah,' said Will, reaching for the towel as he stepped out of the tub.

'Thank you. You are looking very well yourself. Quite a family man, aren't you?'

'Oh, got a few, you know,' said Will. 'When are you an' Shon going to make a start?'

'Are you going to the singing over the Big Field to-night?' Susan cut in with.

'Yes, I've a party going. Are you going?'

'Too true we are to hear Megan sing in the choir,' said Will.

'I've got the gel from the top house but one coming to mind the children for me to go,' said Susan.

'How do I look?' said Megan, filling the doorway.

'You look lovely, my dear,' said Moriah.

'Yes, don't she,' said Susan. 'Don't touch your bopa Megan,' she cried as the children were moving towards her. 'Hide yourself for shame's sake, Will,' she shrieked, for Will had turned to have a good look at Megan in the doorway in her white concert dress.

'Hurry up to get ready for us all to walk together over as far as the Pavilion,' said Megan.

'Reach me my evening shirt, Susan,' said Will.

'Here's Annie come to look to the children,' said Megan as making way for a twelve-year-old girl to pass her in.

'The worst of to-night is my sham-front an' collar,' said Will, lowering his Welsh flannel evening shirt down over his head. He called it his 'evening shirt' because he wore it of an evening.

'Mind a minute, please,' said Susan, the tub half-full of dirty water held up by the two handles. Megan and Moriah stepped outside out of the way for Susan to put the tub, with the water in it for washing the floor next morning, on the bit o' baili.

'Come to wait in our house,' said Megan to Moriah; more room there, for there was little room in Will's house with the children, an' the gel who had come to mind them for Will an' Susan to go to the Eisteddfod concert.

Will struggled for some time with his sham-front and collar before calling for Susan's aid. 'Like a child you are,' she said, her knuckles pressing into his windpipe as she worked to attach the collar over the sham-front to his shirt-button. It was a job getting Will into a sham-front and collar for chapel on Sunday, for to attend a funeral, or for some other occasion or function such as this. His usual evening neckwear was the comfortable and easy-to-

put-on muffler which was favoured by underground hauliers generally.

'You're choking me, Susan,' he gasped.

'Quiet, I've nearly got it.'

The sham-front was a white stiff-starched breastplate, the collar was stiff and high, then there was the tie to fix -

'I'd rather work an extra shift than wear these d -'

'Quiet a minute - There.'

'Time, too. Listen, I must have one pint before going to the Pavilion, so I'll slip across to the Nelson an' swallow one, an' I'll be waiting outside for you an' Megan an' Moriah -'

'One, remember,' cried Susan as he ran out.

He was - fair play for him - waiting outside the Nelson when Megan, Moriah, Susan and Sophie came round the corner from the Row. The street was crowded with people who had come from everywhere to the upland industrial metropolis of Wales to hear the oratorio composed by one of the town's greatest men. Many had come from America to the world's greatest iron and coal town. For though some people said it wasn't the world's greatest, there were people in Merthyr to prove that it was. Hadn't Merthyr for over a century been sending not only its coal and iron, but also its skilled workers to all parts of the world. To America and to Russia - all over the world we sent skilled workers - bar Turkey. We sent our iron rails there, but we wouldn't send skilled workers to Turkey in response to the Sultan's request. Had it been a Christian country where it was a case of one man one wife, we might have long ago started an ironworks in Turkey.

But the point is that this week's National Eisteddfod was acting like a magnet, which drew thousands of those we had sent to develop other districts and countries, back to their hometown for a week or so. Couldn't move for 'em.

Four days of competition followed by four grand even-

ing concerts – and this was the last of 'em. Megan ran round the back of the Pavilion, the artistes entrance, to join the other choristers where they were waiting for the signal to 'take the platform,' as they say in Merthyr. 'See you later,' said Moriah as she went to join her party in the block of five-shilling seats Shon had booked – and paid for out of his own pocket. That meant a couple of pounds, two gold sovereigns, for Moriah had brought six o' them foreign opera singers down with her, and not one o' them thought of putting their hand down for money to pay for a thing.

Will like a ramrod in his bit o' best, an' his sham-front an' collar an' bowler-hat, went with Sophie an' Susan to the two-shilling seats, with the tickets Megan had bought for them. The Pavilion, which was a huge one, was crowded, and right at the back behind the shilling seats there were people standing thick. In the heat Will's sham-front began to bulge, and he whispered to Susan that he thought it was coming loose from his Welsh flannel shirt. 'Never,' she said, 'for I pinned it fast with a brass pin to your shirt.' 'Oh, well,' sighed Will, sitting with his head in his collar in a way that made it appear as though he was doing a balancing trick with his bowler-hat, same as the man did with the cannon-balls in Cook's Circus that time.

There was loud applause when Dr. Parry – one of our own – walked to his seat in which he sat to listen to the overture to one of his operas being played by Cyfarthfa Band – by kind permission of W. T. Crawshay, Esq., of Cyfarthfa Castle – and the performance of one of his oratorios, *Emmanuel*, by the choir Megan was singing in. 'Who are them all?' said Will, when the soloists came on two by two to seat themselves between the choir behind and the orchestra in front. 'I forget now who Megan said they all was to be,' said Susan. The man next to Will who could read held his programme out to Will who couldn't. 'Never mind,' said Will, 'thank you for offering. I knows one of 'em, anyway. I know Eos Morlais.' Of course

everybody knew Eos Morlais, the local tenor who without ever going to college or abroad to learn could sing the heads off – so Merthyr and Dowlais people thought – them who had been to college to learn singing. Then the man next to Will went on to tell him who the other singers were. ‘That other young fellow,’ he said, ‘is Ben Davies – they say he’s a good tenor, too. The man with the whiskers is Lewis Thomas, the bass singer –’ ‘Who are them women?’ said Susan, leaning over Will to ask the man. ‘Mary Davies and Lizzie Williams – sopranos they are – and Lizzie Evans the contralto.’ ‘Yes, I remember, Megan told me,’ said Susan.

Before the singing started the Cyfarthfa Band in their fine uniforms played the overture to Dr. Parry’s opera, *Blodwen*. Fair play to the band, which some called ‘the English band’, and others called ‘the boss’s band’, it played grand that night. Yes, no doubt about it, it was the best item of the concert. George Livsey conducted the band well that night. He took over the conductorship when his father, old Ralph Livsey, died in ’63, after he had conducted the band since 1848. The band it was first started in 1844 by Robert T. Crawshay, who said to his brother Francis: ‘I’d like to have a good brass band.’ Francis his brother said to him: ‘Well, Bob, if you’re going to have a band, have a good one.’ It was a good-sized one at the start, but not what you can call a good band. They were eighty players, or ‘performers’ as some say, but it wasn’t a good band. A man who after going round with a band playing outside a menagerie came to keep the Market Tavern, was made conductor, but he was no great shakes as a conductor. For nearly four years the band was little more than a noise. Then Ralph Livsey took it in hand, and made it as good as any army band. His son George made it the best band in Britain. It went about the country playing – by kind permission of Mr. Crawshay all the time – and when it played with the Massed Guards’ Bands under Dan Godfrey, people said that Dan Godfrey

reckoned the Cyfarthfa Band as good, if not better than any Guards' Band. It was years and years before any Welshman played in that band, perhaps thirty years before a few Welshmen learnt how to play bombardons, bugles and euphoniums. There's a lot that could be said about the band which is now playing the overture to Dr. Parry's opera, *Blodwen*, for which some said Dr. Parry made the band parts for a brass band to play, but there were others who said that it was George Livsey, the conductor of the band, made the band parts. Whoever made the band parts, it sounded grand.

After the band finished playing and cleared off out of sight, Lewis Morgan came on to start conducting the oratorio, *Emmanuel*, by Dr. Parry. There were soloists, orchestra and choir for our local conductor to handle. Some said that he made a good job of it, but Dr. Parry himself – and he ought to know after having composed the work – said that it was 'a dreadful fiasco'. Megan, she thought it went lovely. Will said that it sounded all right to him, and the audience as a whole went home looking as though they had had their money's-worth. Moriah wanted Megan to go down to the Castle Hotel after the performance, for she was giving a bit of a supper-party – 'poor old Shon again' Megan said to Sophie – to some of the artistes who had sung during the evening, and to the opera singers she had brought from somewhere up England with her. 'No – thank you for asking,' said Megan.

Shon invited Will, and Will went. 'May as well now that I've got this sham-front an' collar on,' he said to Susan.

'All right, but remember that you've got to go to your work in the morning, that's all,' said Susan.

Wasn't Shon glad that he had Will with him that night, for when he was full up with the singers' talk of singing, and Madame Patti, Signor Foli, and a lot of other people he knew little about – and cared less about – he took Will

to a little room where a few commercials were drinking and smoking without any such fuss and bother as there was in the room where the supper-party which Shon would have to stump-up for was being held. ‘This is something like,’ said Shon. ‘Make yourself comfortable now, Will.’

Will, with his bowler-hat on his knees, sat smiling rather foolishly at the commercials whilst Shon was telling the man with the green apron on that brought the drinks to tell lies for him. ‘I’m gone out for a walk with my brother-in-law, remember,’ he said to the man. ‘No, here I am, Shon,’ said Will, a bit dense after the few strange drinks he had taken in the other room. ‘I know, and that’s where you’re going to stay,’ said Shon. ‘My best respects Here, have a cigar.’

After Shon had lit the cigar for him, Will, with the cigar in one hand, his glass in the other, looked around the room and said: ‘Shon, this is the first time for me to be in a hotel like this – an’ drinking out o’ glasses like this – an’ smoking cigars as well.’ ‘Drink up,’ said Shon. Presently there was only one commercial traveller left in the room with Shon and Will, and he said: ‘Do you mind if I join you?’ ‘Delighted to have you,’ said Shon. ‘Come you,’ said Will.

After a long, long time the party in the other room broke up, and the man with the green apron fetching the drinks all time told Shon that Moriah and his other friends staying there had all gone to bed. ‘Thank you,’ said Shon, ‘now we can drink at our ease.’

An hour or so later Will put his hands on the table to press himself up on to his feet. ‘I must go home now.’

‘What’s your hurry?’ said Shon.

‘No need to hurry,’ said the commercial traveller.

‘Yes, mus’ go home, gen’lemen – for you are gen’lemen. For you’ve treated me like – like a gen’leman. Yes, don’ say you haven’t. Cigars – bes’ o’ everything. Shan’ forget. No, Will Davies – shan’ forget.’

‘Tut-tut,’ said the commercial traveller.

'Not t-t-tut-tut, gen'lemen. I know my place, gen'lemen – don' I, Susan?' He looked around for Susan. 'Damn, Susan's not here. In the house – waitin' for me, gen'lemen. My Susan's a gran' gel, gen'lemen. Up before it's ligh' – ay, gran' gel, Susan. Me up at fi' 'clock. I don' believe in losing work like – like some of 'em do. Haulier, thass me. Will Davies, the haulier. You ask for Will Davies, the haulier – they'll tell you. Haulier. Nothing more – nothing less. If us hauliers don' go to our work, then what's the poor colliers to do? Tell me tha' gen'lemen. Who'll drive 'em empty trams – an' take away their full trams? Tell me that, gen'lemen.'

'All right, come on,' said Shon, taking his arm.

After a few good-nights to the commercial traveller Will left with Shon's assistance. In only one house in the Row was there a light. 'Thass – thass Susan,' said Will, pointing in a waggly way. It was Susan. 'Where can you say you've been?' 'With Shon, Susan fach.'

'Humph. Thanks, Shon – for nothing. Go you now.' She took Will over from him, then shut the door in his face. She lugged Will across the floor of the living-room to drop him into the arm-chair before kneeling down to unlace his boots. Roughly she stripped him, sham-front, collar an' all. Into bed she helped him. He had about two hours' sleep before she called him to go to his work at five o'clock.

'Oh, my head,' he said.

'Never mind your head. Come on.'

CHAPTER XIV

A WOMAN OF PROPERTY

MEGAN was sorry now that she had missed morning service at Zoar Chapel to 'send' Moriah as far as the railway station. But the old train was not starting until half-past eleven; then Sophie had made the bakestone cake Moriah used to like for her to have to eat on the train. Megan was waiting in the railway station for a long time before Moriah, Shon an' them others she had with her came from the Castle Hotel in cabs — as if they couldn't walk that far. An' the luggage they had, an' the bother they made with the porters an' cabbies. Like a circus between 'em all, Megan thought. Moriah had wanted Megan to call at the Castle Hotel, to ride down to the railway station in a cab with her, but Megan said: 'I don't go a-near a public-house on week-days, so I'm sure not to go a-near one on a Sunday.'

Moriah had tried to tell her that the Castle Hotel was not what you could call a 'public-house', but an hotel where only distinguished visitors and the higher-grade commercial travellers stayed at. 'Yes, an' where they stays drinking till all hours of the night,' said Megan. 'Our Will is not right yet after what Shon gave him to drink there. I'll be waiting at the station for you to come from there.'

She was, dressed in her bit o' best, and with the bake-stone cake Sophie had made special for Moriah in her hand. 'Ah, there you are, my dear,' said Moriah, stepping out of the cab which Shon had first stepped out of to hold the door open for her. She told Shon to remember this,

and be careful of that. ‘That can go into the van, but that I’d like in the compartment with me.’ Leaving Shon to settle for the cabs, and speak to the porters who came rushing, Moriah took Megan’s arm the way Megan didn’t like, and walked her towards the departure platform. ‘I’ve brought some bakestone cake that Sophie made for you to eat on the train.’ ‘How sweet of you,’ said Moriah lightly, waving the rest of the party forward. ‘Not me, Sophie,’ said Megan. ‘Where will you put it?’ ‘Give it to Shon when he comes, and he – why don’t those people come along?’

They came talking and laughing till the station so quiet on Sunday morning began to take on the appearance of an excursion morning, any sort of morning but Sunday morning. One man was holding his hand to his head, and when asked by one of the women how he felt, he, like a basso-profundo, groaned, ‘O, Emmanuel,’ and that made all the others shriek with laughter. Megan pulled her arm loose from Moriah – for she was laughing with the rest. Megan, who was not as dull as all that, knew what they were laughing at. The oratorio she had with the rest of the Merthyr Harmonic Society sung, was, she now realised, being made fun of by these acting people. She could have scratched the women’s eyes out for it, and as for the men, the stuck-up old –

‘Let me introduce you to Signor Parrelli,’ said Moriah.

The youngest of the men she had with her, his face like a big duck-egg with a moustache on it, bowed to Megan and grabbed her hand to kiss it. As the others came forward Megan put her hand behind her back, the bakestone cake in paper still in the other hand. The women Moriah had with her they only bowed and smiled, and their names as spoken by Moriah, Megan could not hear for the temper she was in, and trying to conceal. She noticed that two compartments of a carriage had been reserved for the party. Megan counted them – only eight with Shon. Then why did they want two compartments?

'Is everything all right?' Moriah asked Shon, who had been running about 'like a fool for 'em', Megan thought.

'Yes, and here are the tickets,' said Shon.

'Give them to Enrico,' said Moriah.

As Shon with the tickets in his hand went towards the fat little man with grey hair, Megan asked: 'Why, isn't Shon going with you?' No, Moriah explained, he was staying. Had written to tell his men to pack up and come on to Merthyr, had also sent for his horse and trap. 'He's hoping to open here Saturday evening. By then, thank heavens, I shall be far enough away.'

Megan was about to give Moriah a mouthful for this when the guard he blew his whistle to send her and those she had with her scurrying into their compartments. A light kiss apiece through the window for Shon and Megan from Moriah, a groan as the train started of 'O Emmanuel' from the basso-profundus, and away they went in the train, laughing, leaving Megan to bite her lower lip on the platform.

'Well, they're gone,' said Shon from behind her.

'Yes, an' good riddance. Oh, look,' she said, holding out the package. 'What?' said Shon. 'The bakestone cake, I forgot – but why didn't she take it when I said? Never mind. Shon, you two lives a funny way.' Shon shrugged his shoulders. Megan looking after the train nearly out of sight, shook her head: 'Yes, a funny way. There she is gone off to sing opera with that lot, an' you staying here to sell.'

'She's got her work; I've got mine.'

'Husband and wife should be working together. Let's go.' As they walked out of the station she asked: 'Have you ever heard her sing in front of people, Shon?'

'Of course I have. Why, haven't you?'

'You know that I haven't. Last time I heard her sing in front o' people was when she sang with me for what you said – old liar as you was – was a marble clock.'

'Ah, those were the days,' sighed Shon.

'Days I don't ever want to see again. Of course, it would be nice to have dad an' mam back if it could be – though p'raps it wouldn't after all. But I'm sure of one thing. I don't want to see them days again when boys like our Joe went to the pit before they could walk properly, an' gels like me an' Moriah to the brickyard before – But what use botherin'? Sophie'll be off because I didn't remember to give Moriah these bakestone cakes. I did remember, but Moriah said give them to you. I thought then that you was going off with them. Oh, where you having dinner to-day?'

'At the hotel.'

'Would you care to have a bit o' dinner, such as it is, with me an' Sophie? Better than by yourself, or with strangers, on a Sunday.'

'Yes, much better.'

'Then come now, for dinner won't be long.' Across to the Row they went together, and the neighbours who knew – for the neighbours knew everything about everybody – what time the old train was taking Moriah away, now asked each other how Shon was not gone with her. 'Here's Shon come to have a bit o' dinner with us, Sophie,' said Megan.

'There's plenty for him,' said Sophie, 'an' it'll be ready before long if he'll sit a minute.'

'I forgot to give Moriah your bakestone cake after all.'

'Well, of all –' Sophie didn't like to say more in front of Shon. She dusted the arm-chair for him. 'Sit down – an' sit you down too,' she said to Megan, who was putting an apron on to help. 'Don't want to be putting dinner in your bit o' best.' She made Megan sit like a dummy near the doorway.

'The leaves of the trees over the Big Field are browning,' Megan said for the sake of something to say. 'Christmas will be here again before we know it.' 'Yes,' said Shon. 'Then my old rheumatic will be here too, you watch.' 'Do you suffer from rheumatic then?' 'Don't I? Sophie'll

tell you. Some days in the winter I can't wring a rag o' clothes.'

'There's no call for you to wring clothes,' said Sophie.

After dinner they had a cup o' tea, and Shon smoked one of his cigars, which the neighbours from the top to the bottom of the Row could smell. Before two o'clock, two of Will's children from next door came to take Megan to Zoar Sunday-school. 'Are you ready, bopa Megan?' they wanted to know.

'In a minute. Wait till I get the cards.' There was a card for each of Will's four children, a card on which Megan every Sunday put a few coppers, for them all to have something to draw at Christmas. To-day Shon gave a silver sixpence to put on each card. 'I'll walk down as far as Zoar with you an' the children,' he said. 'No,' said Megan, 'better you go for a bit of a walk with our Will from next door, then come back here to tea. Then, if you like, you can come to Zoar with us all to hear our new preacher to-night. When was you in chapel last?'

Shon tried to remember. 'Never mind botherin' your head to remember,' said Megan. 'You shall come with us to hear John Thomas to-night. There's a preacher for you, if you like. He - But you shall hear for yourself. Come, children.'

At half-past five sharp all those in the Row 'tending chapel were on their way, some to Zion, others to Ebenezer - yes, there was one old woman who went all the way down to Ebenezer Chapel, which she called 'Capel Isha', which means the 'Lower Chapel', twice every Sunday no matter what the weather was like. By their chapels people were known to each other better than they were known in any other way. On the street people would point at a family party made up of three generations on their way to chapel, point and say: 'Bethesda people they are', or 'Salem people they are'. Baptists, Methodists, and Independents, which some wanted to call 'Congregationalists'. Eighteen chapels made up of the three denominations held a lot of people,

yet there was hardly a member of any of the eighteen chapels who wasn't known for what he was by the members of the other chapels. In each of the eighteen chapels there was 'the leader of the singing', who was next in importance to the preacher. At the singing festivals called in Welsh the 'Cymanca Ganu', it was the conductor of the singing that was by far the most important man. At the Cymanca Ganu, which each denomination held in the biggest of its chapels in every district, the people sang and sang, anthems and hymns in Welsh. Most inspiring are our singing festivals in the chapels. Megan wouldn't have that any Cymanca Ganu anywhere was as good and inspiring as Zoar Chapel's Cymanfa Ganu. But the people who were members of the different chapels all thought that *their* chapel was best in everything, and nobody can be blamed for sticking up for his chapel. Each chapel had its choir of sure-shot singers, singers who from their hearts, not their heads, could hit the right note like a first-class shot in the Merthyr Volunteers making a bull's-eye every time. That these sure-shot singers in the chapels hit the right notes from their hearts, and not from their heads, was made clear by the Merthyr National Eisteddfod committee sending to ask choir conductors how many of their choirs knew music to read it, and the conductors they sent back to say that about one out of every four of their singers could now, thank goodness. That was this year at Merthyr, where in eighteen chapels this evening, the choirs and the congregations as a whole are singing in a way that would make the stranger within the gates think that every one of them were trained singers that knew all there was to know about music.

Then the preachers young, middle-aged and aged, eighteen of them, each in a pulpit standing. Every word, look and gesture charged with meaning. The preachers made full use of their pulpits. They leaned forward over the open Bible pointing, they stood back from it upright to recover themselves after a lyrical outburst. They turned right to preach directly at those seated in what were called

'side-seats' well forward to behind the pulpit. Next they turned left to preach at those in similar seats on the other side. Then to their front again. Three times they often repeated the same sentence, such a sentence as 'the God of love'. From that one sentence they would swayingly speak prophetically into what in Welsh is called the 'hwyl', which means the state in which a preacher surrenders himself entirely to the spirit moving him. In that state words, single words, elongated to run the scale from bottom doh to top doh. Doh - me - soh - doh. From the deacons in the big seat, and from members of the congregation, responses unconscious from the depths out of which the God in man is freed by the preacher.

But it is John Thomas that Megan is listening to now, John Thomas, 'our new preacher', as the young people of Zoar Chapel go about saying. All the young people of the chapel are inclined to rave about him, but the elderly majority of deacons and the elderly people of the membership are not yet prepared to admit that they have in 'the young man' a worthy successor to the many pulpit giants who have occupied Zoar's pulpit since the day the few who met in a room built the first Zoar, which has since been rebuilt. Zoar's deacons from of old have always been most strict, men who have always reserved all their praise for Him alone. They have before now turned out people such as Rosser Beynon, leader of the singing, for what they thought was 'circus Christianity'. He who led the singing for them had in his zeal led singers through the street of a hundred pubs to try and sing the town sober. His singers wore temperance medals, and for that 'exhibition of vanity', as the deacons called it, the leader and the singers were lined up along Zoar's aisles to be castigated by the deacons. Rather than suffer castigation for having done what they considered good work, Rosser Beynon and some of the singers left Zoar Chapel for other places of worship. Some because of differences and restrictions left to build themselves another chapel of the same denomina-

tion, and everywhere there were such 'splits'. Bethesda Chapel the result of a 'split' from Zoar, whose deacons would stand no 'new thing' in the way of preaching, singing, dress, speech, or anything.

Now the eldest of the deacons were listening critically to the preaching of 'the young man'. For John Thomas was only about thirty years of age. For seven years before accepting the 'call' to Zoar, he had laboured in a tinplate town in the west. From there his fame spread abroad, and the young people of Zoar all thought that Zoar had been most fortunate in securing his services. 'We shall see,' said the older people. One of the new school of preachers, John Thomas was. No new theology, or anything like that, for God was, is, and ever shall be, he said. But he was different from the preachers of the old school inasmuch as he had regard for the fact that, for a decade, the young people of the chapels, through what they called 'schooling' in the elementary schools, had by now grown to expect something more from preachers than their fathers and grandfathers had been satisfied with. So he tried, and succeeded in his attempts to make Zoar Chapel something more than a mere hiding-place from the evils of the outside world.

He was less of a 'thunderer' than the preachers of the old school. Megan often tried to find a word or words with which to explain John Thomas's power in the pulpit. Some might call what made for that power 'spiritual magnetism', others might — Yet what does it matter? There the young man was in the pulpit of Zoar, where twice each Sunday Megan thought she was witnessing a transfiguration. For John Thomas's face flanked by side-whiskers seemed to her to shine with a holy radiance. His eyes to her like pools, his voice — oh, his voice. . . .

Will, who went only on Sunday evenings, for he had his one long sleep of the week Sunday mornings, liked listening to John Thomas preaching. Like his father before him, Will, in the short prayer after seating himself, told God that

he hoped that He would overlook the drop o' drink there was between them. 'For there's only the drop o' drink, God. I works hard every day, I don't lay a hand on Susan ever — you know that, God. Neither do I lay hands on the children very often. I try to do . . .'

It would be no good for Will to go to the mid-week prayer meeting at Zoar, for had he gone, and they called upon him to 'say a little word', he would have been in a fix. His silent prayer, once a week only. He was too tired other nights to think about praying, evidently, though on Saturday nights, after a short shift, he might have managed a short prayer, but then Saturday night was the night he put the drop o' drink between himself and God; so once a week only he prayed as soon as he entered Zoar on the Sunday evenings. This once-weekly prayer was a bit mixed, but it was quite sincere. After he had said this bit of a prayer he heaved a sigh of relief as he sat back in his seat.

Shon, when he saw Will bow his head, followed suit, and sat there with his hand over his eyes wondering why he had allowed Megan to persuade him to come to Zoar this evening. What had Will sitting next him to say to God — if anything? What did one say to God? There he was, a Cheap Jack able to talk a donkey's hind-leg off any night of the week in the way of business, now dumb as an oyster before God. What God? he was asking himself, as he felt Will sitting next to him straightening up. So being as he could think of nothing to say he decided that for the present he would just say 'Amen' to whatever it was that Will had said.

Susan said her short prayer over the head of the indifferent baby she was nursing in the shawl, a few words of prayer backed by the hope that the baby would stay quiet and not make her take him out like he had before more than once. Sophie interrupted her short prayer to hiss 'be quiet' to the boy Owen, who was telling his brother David to move up a bit. Megan, among other things, asked God

to look after Joe down Cardiff, where she hoped he was 'tending a chapel of some sort. She also thanked God same as she had every Sunday for years for 'the bit o' money' which had come to her from old bopa Lloyd, and which had enabled her to do for Joe what she had done, and for herself an' Sophie an' the neighbours a shilling now an' then, an' something to put on the Sunday-school cards of her brother's children next door. . . .

After she had opened her eyes and sat back in her seat she went on to think of the bit o' money which was getting less every day. She would have to be careful, stop spending fine like she had been. That white dress to sing with the choir in the Eisteddfod, the stuff an' the making, had cost her nearly a sovereign. Then there was six shillings for tickets for Susan, Will an' Sophie to go one night, and she had been going herself all the week the Eisteddfod was on. Yes, spending fine. Crowded the chapel is. P'raps when she gets better to gather her own rents again, Marged Ellis will give me something for going round after rent for her all this time. The dressmaker living over by the Drill Hall who had made that white dress for her to sing in the choir was walking down the aisle to her seat on the 'floor', as Megan called the seating accommodation on the floor of the chapel, in the gallery of which she herself was seated. Dressed lovely the dressmaker was.

No wonder, for she made plenty money with all them gels she had working for her learning dressmaking. The room of the house over by the Drill Hall crowded with gels all sewing for their learning, an' the dressmaker herself always working the machine and sending words of advice and warning around. Only stopping the machine to interview a customer - 'Yes, that'll make up lovely, and just your colour; yes, I'll finish it off myself.' Or she would be telling the gels some story to make 'em laugh whilst they rested their eyes a bit, eyes strained by working half the night on somebody's 'bit o' black'. All over the room stuffed with gels sewing, dress material taking shape, the floor covered

with snippets of material. The gels superior in their manner, looking down on brickyard gels and others who worked in works and on pit-heads. For a gel 'learning the dressmaking' was a cut above all them gels about the place who did rough work where there were men – many of them low-speaking – about. True it is that many a gel 'learning the dressmaking' went into what was called 'the decline', and all o' them were pale as snow, but it was a ladylike way of earning a livelihood. The gels learning dressmaking they knew all about drawing in the waist to twenty inches and even less above the bustle, or what some who didn't know what they were talking about called 'the Grecian bend'. All the gels 'learning the dressmaking' massed their hair to make it look like a soldier's busby or something by putting pads inside their own mass of hair. Anyway, the best dressmaker in Merthyr was the one living over by the Drill Hall. People came to her from everywhere. There were scores about the place calling themselves dressmakers, many of whom 'took' gels to learn them dressmaking before they could properly make a dress themselves. There were the Irish dressmakers, who made dresses the way the Irish gels wanted them made to march in on St. Patrick's Day behind the Irish drum an' fife band, which turned out to head the procession on St. Patrick's Day. All the gels 'tending Zoar Chapel they had their dresses made by the dressmaker living over by the Drill Hall, for she was a member of Zoar Chapel, and a good dressmaker as well. A bit dear –

'There's John Thomas, there's our new preacher,' said Megan, nudging Shon as though he were blind and so not able to see the man going up into his pulpit. Soon the people crowding the chapel were on their feet, singing. Singing.

'Isn't he a grand preacher?' said Megan to Shon as on the way home after the service.

'Yes, quite good,' he said. 'I don't think I'll come up with you. Get back to the hotel. You coming down for a

walk?' he said to Will, who shook his head and said: 'I never darkens the door of a public-house on Sundays, Shon.'

'No,' said Susan, 'bad enough the last time you took him.'

'All right, all right,' said Shon, smiling, and waving a good-bye as turning about to leave them.

By the following Saturday evening what Megan called his 'tent' was open for business in Merthyr again. Megan and Susan and Sophie and the children went across to have a look, and Megan told the others that the place was much bigger an' better than it was the time when she knew it first. 'Look, he's selling carpets an' everything now.' Just then the gel cleaning for old Marged Ellis came across from the house to see for her. 'I've been over your house,' the gel said. 'What for?' said Megan. 'I think she's dead on the bed up there,' the gel said. 'No.' 'Come an' see for yourself,' said the gel. Leaving Sophie an' Susan an' the children to listen to Shon selling things, Megan went with the gel. Dead Marged Ellis was right enough, but

'egan sent for the doctor to make sure. After the doctor been and gone, Megan sent the gel up to Pen Incline, fetch Martha James to make Marged Ellis look tidy. As luck would have it, the gel met Martha and her husband one each side the donkey on the street as they were about to turn right off the main road to go up Pen Incline. The donkey was not in the up-ended pigs' wash barrel on wheels, but out of harness with only the bit o' cord tied round his head for a bridle. Across his back to bend him down in the middle was a two hundred weight sack of wet grain from the brewery.

'Oh, thank goodness,' cried the gel, 'now I won't have to go all the way to Pen Incline. Run off my feet I am. First down to Megan's, then she sent me down for the doctor -'

'Who is it?' said Martha James, stopping the donkey to lean against him.

'It's old Marged Ellis dead on the bed.'

'God help her,' said Martha, unconcerned, taking her

weight off the donkey. 'Go you on home with the donkey to 'tend to them pigs,' she told her husband. 'For I must go an' put her right. Come on,' she said to the gel. 'But don't hurry,' she said as the gel started off. 'This is not a confinement, an' the woman screechin' murder like some of 'em do. We'll find old Marged quiet enough, God help her.' She stopped to turn about and look after the donkey her husband was leading up the hill. 'As good as gold he is,' she murmured. 'Your husband?' said the gel. 'No, that little donkey of ours.'

Martha then turned about again to follow the gel up to where Marged Ellis was waiting to be put to look 'tidy'. She had a 'tidy' funeral, went to the Cefn in the hearse with glass panels. After the funeral Megan opened her eyes like saucers when the lawyer informed her that the houses and what money Marged Ellis had left were all hers now. 'This big old house as well?' gasped Megan. The lawyer nodded as he bagged his papers. 'Well, well, well w.' said Megan. All them houses hers now, so it would rent for herself she would be gathering from now Better send for Joe to come up to talk to the lawyer. came like a longdog, as they say in Merthyr. 'Right, leave everything to me,' he said. Megan was glad . . .

Some would have that it was the Phoenix Park murde. in May that started what came about in July over at Tredegar - and nearly came about in Merthyr as well. The first news Merthyr had of it was when Frankie Haggerty stopped his pony outside Dan Delaney's house that Saturday evening. Dan was sat smoking his pipe outside the house, inside which his wife, Peg, was talking to one of the Irish women from Company Row.

'Hullo, Frankie,' said Dan, as his wife came out like she usually did to buy cheap anything Frankie had not disposed of in the coal and iron towns along the tops of the valleys beyond Dowlais.

'Holy Mother o' God,' she cried as she saw the bleeding

man kneeling on Frankie's flat cart like if he was praying. Dan ran to help the man down off the cart and into the house, and whilst the two women were attending to him Frankie explained to Dan.

Frankie was one of the many costers which some called 'hawkers' who travelled from Merthyr daily to hawk fish, fruit and vegetables through the top-end towns of a half-dozen valleys. For our town was the supply town of the head-band of townships of the six valleys. On foot and with pony and float, and cart and horse we supplied them before the trains started to run, and Merthyr was still supplying them. Frankie Haggerty had a good little pony, a well-built flat float that some would call a 'cart', and he had customers he could depend on all the way from Dan Delaney's in Penydarren to Dennis Slavin's house in Ebbw Vale ten miles or so distant.

'eople so far away when wanting things said: 'Let's go over to Merthyr for 'em next pay-Saturday.' Things to eat ~~and~~ wear. But not everybody could go over to Merthyr, ~~so~~ Merthyr went over to them, as you might say. Credit-drapers, costers, and men who carried Welsh woollen stockings on a pole, stockings made at our Merthyr factory, all went over the mountains to those other places early each morning, to return each night. The man carrying woollen stockings on a pole like the one on which buckets of milk are carried one each end, carried in addition to the stockings a large parcel of good Welsh flannel shirts in a big parcel covered over with shiny-black waterproof cloth. He also had a waterproof covering to go over his shoulder-pole loaded heavy with stockings. For when the rain comes to the top end of those valleys, a man doing business through them on foot wants something to keep the rain away from his stock.

Frankie was one of the scores of costers who early each morning bought wholesale off the Merthyr Market's wholesale men, to retail throughout long days along the high head-band of the six valleys. Now he stands telling

Dan how, when he was returning empty across the top, over the lonely road that crosses the wild stretch of common between Rhymney Bridge and Dowlais Top, which in the darkness of the night was none too safe for those with money on 'em, and as he was driving along that road Frankie heard a voice cry: 'Help, for the love o' God.'

"Twas himself,' said Frankie, pointing to the man without a shirt the two women were attending to. 'With a tater sack I covered his shoulders, and with straw an' paper from the bottom of the empty apple-barrel I tried to stop the flow o' blood that was making red an' wet the bottom of me cart.'

Many a cart – the drivers no doubt thinking the man the loser in a drunken mountain fight – had driven by the faster for the cries for help they heard. 'Ay, many a cart went by before I stopped to help him all blood out o' the ditch beside the road, an' up on to the cart. Ay, an' there'll no doubt be many another like him between here an' Tredegar before morning. Dan, it makes me blood boil. What have we Irish here to do with what happened that day in Dublin?'

'Nothing,' said Dan. 'But tell me what the man told you.'

Frankie repeated to Dan as much as he had been able to get from the man as driving along. Short, but not sweet, he told how the mob in Tredegar had burnt all the Irish living there out of their homes, and beaten them away over the mountains. From behind, the two women wiping him clean of blood and holding a cup of tea for him to drink, the beaten Irishman tearfully corroborated.

Dan Delaney looking grave moved to stand in the doorway, from where he looked out on the pay-Saturday crowd of Welsh and Irish full of the street. Here in Merthyr, Penydarren and Dowlais, he thought, there were more Irish and Welsh living close together in less than three miles of ground than there are in all them places along the top. An' if what's now going on in Tredegar starts here it'll be worse than Hell this place'll be before the morning –

'Frankie, I'll ride down with you as far as the priest's.'
'Jump up.'

'I'll be back before long,' cried Dan to his wife, jumping to seat himself on the side of the flat cart, and his hand as he did so rested on the man's blood turning black on the bottom of the cart. 'As fast as your pony can, Frankie.' Frankie drove with his legs hanging outside on the left front-hand corner of the flat-cart, Dan rode with his legs hanging down on the back right-hand corner of the cart. Fast the pony trotted to where the priest lived. The priest he listened whilst Frankie told him all he had been able to get out of the battered, bleeding and frightened Tredegar Irishman. "Tis bad enough over there, your reverence," said Dan, after Frankie had spoken, 'but 'tis nothing to the way it'll be over here if once it starts. Tredegar's only a few miles away as the crow flies, an' these things, like all things bad, they spread like wildfire. Think, your reverence, smashing, burning, beating, an' driven naked out o' the place like that poor man now in my house.'

'Yes, yes, I know, I know,' cried the priest, walking the room trying to think of something to do – something which might be done now before – Someone who could influence the Welsh. He'd answer for the Irish of the place. Who? Who? There was that preacher, Watcyn Jones – Yes, he, owing to his speaking during parliamentary elections, was better known, and seemed to be better liked by the Welsh ironworkers and colliers than any of the other Non-conformist ministers. He might . . . 'We'll see,' he said aloud. 'I'm going to see one of the Welsh preachers, he lives in Thomastown – '

'Then go with Frankie in the cart,' said Dan.
'I will, come on – an' you, Dan.'

'Your hat, your reverence,' said Dan. But the priest was climbing on to the middle of the cart. 'Mind that blood there,' said Frankie. 'Right, Dan!' Away they went on the flat-cart drawn by the little pony trotting fast when

he should have been resting in the stable. People in the crowded street stared at the cart with a priest sat on his behind in, and the driver shouting people out of the way. 'Left after you pass St. David's Church,' cried the priest. 'Right, your reverence,' Frankie shouted back.

'This is it, I think,' said the priest, pointing to a house in the uppermost terrace of Thomastown, where the Rev. Watcyn Jones was that very minute discussing with Griffith Rees, one of his deacons, the bad news that had winged its way over the mountain from Tredegar. 'The Catholic priest and some other man wanting to see you, Watcyn,' said his wife as she came in. 'Show them in, Nan – don't you go, Griffith.'

In they came, the priest without a hat, and Dan Delaney. 'No, no, I won't sit down, thank you,' said the agitated priest as the preacher pointed to a chair. 'I've come to see you about what's happening in Tredegar, over the mountain, where my people's homes are being smashed and burnt, where they're being beaten and driven out – and probably murdered by your people over there.'

'My people?' said the preacher.

'Who else but the Welsh?' cried the almost hysterical priest.

'Your reverence,' said Dan, taking his arm. 'Please, your reverence.'

Watcyn Jones took his other arm to lead him to a chair. 'Please sit down,' he said gently. 'We – this is one of my deacons – were discussing the terrible happenings in Tredegar when you came. Very bad; but please remember that there are nearly as many English as Welsh living in Tredegar. So perhaps my people are not altogether to blame for what has happened over there, and what I fear is still going on there. But that's not important for the moment. It isn't so much that that's worrying you and me, for we can do little or nothing towards saving the situation over there in Tredegar. But here, in Merthyr and Dowlais – that's what you're concerned about, isn't it?'

'It is,' said the priest, sitting all worked up on the chair. 'I'm afraid that it will spread to this place, where before the morning your people and mine will be at each other's throats.'

Watcyn Jones shook his head. 'The Welsh and Irish have been living together, ay, and slaving together, far longer here than over in Tredegar. So I don't think . . .' He walked to look out through the window at the town spread out below. 'Yet one never knows. I've seen many a fight here between Welsh and Irish, fights during which police were afraid to show themselves. But never any burning of homes such as is happening at Tredegar.'

'May God look down on my people there,' cried the priest brokenly.

'Amen,' said Watcyn Jones.

'Amen,' said Dan Delaney and Griffith Rees.

'On your people and mine, here and everywhere else, may He look down on,' said Watcyn Jones.

'Amen,' murmured the other three.

Watcyn Jones looking out through the window down on the town now so dangerous on pay-Saturday night. Beyond the town on the Fairground near the canal the naphtha lamps of the roundabouts and side-shows were lighting up a shifting crowd. From the street of a hundred pubs a distant rumble of chattering and chaffering thousands. 'Ten o'clock,' he murmured as his eyes measured the distance from Merthyr through Penydarren to Dowlais. 'One hour before stop-tap, one hour before all the people likely to start something will be out of those public-houses and on the streets. What can we do?' With his back to the others he stood thinking. Then more to himself than to the others he said: 'We could show ourselves. We could walk, this priest and I, like brothers we could walk side by side through this threatened town of ours.' He turned about to face the others. 'Yes, to-night,' he said. 'Your people know you, my people know me. Then shall we walk, you and I, side by side like brothers, that they may

see. I know of no other, no better way, of binding them. Do you?"

The priest stood up. 'I do not, my brother.'
'Then come.'

Out went the preacher and the priest, Dan Delaney and Griffith Rees following. Outside the house the patient little pony in the flat-cart waiting. 'Will you be wanting me any more this night, your reverence?' said the tired Frankie Haggerty.

'No, Frankie,' said the priest. 'We came down in this cart from my house,' the priest explained to Watcyn Jones.

'Wait,' shouted the preacher. 'This will be better than walking. Will this man drive his cart with you and I sat in it, drive it slowly through the street from here to Dowlais?'

'Will you, Frankie?' said the priest.

'Yes, and as far beyond as you say, your reverence - an' the pony on his legs. But he'll not be able to pull Dan an' this other gentleman as well.'

'We'll walk together behind the cart,' said Griffith Rees.
'Won't we?' he said to Dan Delaney.

'We will,' said Dan quietly.

It had all the makings of a comic tableau, yet the thousands who saw it didn't think it funny. Nobody laughed, not out loud, anyway. It was a July night, a lovely July night, and all sorts of rumours about what was happening over in Tredegar were passing from mouth to mouth along the street from Merthyr to Dowlais and back. More people out on the streets late than ever before in the history, the turbulent history of the district. A man drove a grocer's cart back into town from over the top. All places of business over in Tredegar closed and shuttered, he said. Police from all parts being rushed by the brake-load into the place. Many of the Irish killed, he had been told. He had seen their furniture going up in flames. Other rumours, the soldiers had been sent for. Shots had been fired - oh, a terrible state of affairs.

Through the street thick with people, and thicker with rumours, Frankie Haggerty drove his flat-cart at a walk. Preacher and priest seated smiling and talking on the cart, blood of an Irishman now abed in Dan Delaney's house, dry on cart's flat bottom now. The preacher and priest they sit covering the dry blood of an Irishman. At the tail of the cart walking, a Welsh ironworker who is a deacon of Beulah Chapel, and Dan Delaney, the tidy, sober Irishman. The people looked and wondered to see those two couples on and behind the cart drawn by the pony now so tired, for he had been in the shafts fifteen hours. Two ironworkers at the tail of the cart, a preacher and a priest on the cart, two Irish, two Welsh. The Irish and Welsh crowding the streets as they left the pubs nodded their understanding. For an hour and a half the pony paraded the streets, for an hour and a half, from ten o'clock until half-past eleven, by which time the last of the gangs who on most pay-Saturdays made trouble had gone home peaceably.

Through the next day rioting continued over in Tredegar, but all was quiet in Merthyr and Dowlais. Sunday evening a strong company of the 94th Regiment arrived at Tredegar to restore peace. People in Merthyr said that it was funny, in a way, to hear of the 94th Regiment coming to put an end to the rioting at Tredegar, funny they thought it because fifty years before it was some of the 93rd Regiment came to Merthyr to put an end to the rioting then, rioting which ended with the shooting of many by the soldiers, and the hanging of Dic Penderyn.

However, order was restored at Tredegar, and all the rumours about people having been killed were false, for there was not a single person killed — which was a blessing.

CHAPTER XV

PREPARING TO RECEIVE VISITORS FROM AMERICA

OH, shut up about the old house,' said Megan. 'Each time you come up from Cardiff it's to try an' move me from here up to that big old house.'

' "Big old house," ' Joe repeated, then went on to say that he was at a loss to understand why Megan went on living in such a poky little hole in such a stinking little Row, when there was that house up there that old bopa Lloyd and Marged Ellis had lived in.

'Yes, an' died in too,' said Megan.

Joe sighed. 'A hundred pounds spent on the place, and you'd have one of the finest houses in town.'

'This little house will do for me an' Sophie, Joe bach. A hundred pounds, indeed.'

'Well, you won't let, lease or sell it well unless you do spend at least a hundred on the place. There's no need for you to open your eyes so wide at the mention of a paltry hundred, either. I happen to know what you're worth.'

'You know too much, Joe bach.'

'Do stop calling me "Joe bach",' cried Joe, brushing his moustache roughly to the right and to the left. 'It sounds so - well, so up the valleys. And don't speak as though I've been prying into your affairs. It was you sent for me when -'

'I know, Joe bach. But don't bother me all time about going to live up there in that big old house.'

'Big? Three bedrooms and an attic and - Why, you talk as though it were a mansion. You should see some of

the houses our firm handles in Cardiff. Ah, well. You're a funny woman.'

'P'raps I am, an' p'raps too that I'm afraid of getting old up there in that old house like bopa Lloyd did, an' Marged Ellis after her. Here in the Row – there's Will, Susan an' the children next door, an' the neighbours both side me. I feel safe all time. Tidy people my neighbours are, even if some o' the men do take too much to drink now an' then. Tidy people all the same. I feels 'em round me like a blanket in winter, an' like the shade of a tree in the hot summer. Here I can stand on my doorstep an' look up an' down the Row, see the women passing to the tap, the children off to school, the men coming from work – all the time something.'

'Yes, I know the something you get all the time in this Row. I can smell it now.' He took a letter, which had been opened and read, off the mantelpiece. 'In this letter again Llewelyn says next spring. Every year its next spring he and Elias and their wives may cross from America. Shall I tell you why they don't come? Because there's nowhere they can stay at. You couldn't put them up in this – this place, neither could Norah's parents even put her and Llewelyn up anything like comfortable. So it looks like always being *next* spring for them.'

Megan sat looking out, Joe stood playing with his moustache. After a bit she said: 'If I thought it was that is stopping them – What wants to be done to that big old house altogether?'

Joe said painting inside and out. The place had been left to go by the two old women. He'd see Jenkins the builder, Lewis the painter. 'And being as you're about it you may as well get those jungles in front and behind the house attended to.'

'Hol' on, Joe bach. Who said that I was about it?'

Ignoring the question Joe continued. 'Then you'll require some furniture, carpets, etcetera. Leave that to me. Being in the business, I'll be able to get you stuff

as good as new for next to nothing. A hundred pounds will —'

'Another hundred pounds do you mean?'

'Of course. What's the use of spending money on painting and decorating if you're not prepared to spend a little more to furnish it properly. Those gravel paths, new gates you'll have to have. Then a gardener who knows his job to make those back and front jungles into gardens. Lawn and flower garden in front, your kitchen-garden behind the house out of sight. Twenty or thirty pounds should cover that. Then —'

'Stop, Joe, stop now when I tell you, good boy. Hundred pounds this, hundred pounds that, then thirty — is — is it Crawshay's castle you're talking about? an' is it Crawshay's money you think you're handling? My few pounds'll soon be gone if you —'

'Few pounds! Megan, do stop talking like those two old women from whom you got the money and property. Yes, you're talking just as old Marged Ellis used to talk. Do you want to grow old the way they did? Grow older, dirtier and more miserly day by day, until at last you die as they died, leaving what you might have enjoyed to others?'

After a bit Megan said: 'I would like to have place for Llew' an' Lias to come with their wives from America to see me. I'm dying to see 'em — Oh, Sophie,' she said as Sophie came in from shopping a bit, 'how would you like to come an' live with me in that big old house of bopa Lloyd's?'

'One place is as good as another to me,' said Sophie. 'Old Bridget Murphy's gone up there then,' she said next.

'No,' said Megan.

'Yes, God help her,' said Sophie, taking what she had brought into the tiny pantry under the stairs.

'But she was all right when I took her the bit o' 'bacco Tuesday. Who told you?'

'Dai Balaclava. Met him coming out of the Nelson.'

'Was he sober?'

'Sober enough to know what he was talking about. He said the Cath'lics are coming to fetch her from there to bury her tidy.'

'What is all this?' said Joe, impatiently, taking up his bowler-hat, walking-stick and gloves.

'Bridget Murphy – you know, our Sam's mother-in-law when he was alive. Now she've died up the Workhouse. Must have been sudden, Sophie.'

'Then I'm to attend this matter, making that house habitable?' said Joe.

'Yes, tell 'em to make it look tidy for them to come from America – but try not to spend too much, Joe bach. Here, have a cup o' tea before you go.'

Joe said no thank you, too many things to attend to before he returned to Cardiff.

'That boy, Sophie,' said Megan, watching him go over the bridge, 'is off an' off like that all time. You watch, some day he'll meet hisself coming back with his breath in his fist. But haven't he got on, Sophie?'

'No doubt,' Sophie said.

'After we've had a cup o' tea we'll go up to have a look at that old house.'

'Haven't you been in it scores of times?' said Sophie.

'Yes, but with my eyes shut, thinking how quick I could get out of it. Run in, give the rent to old Marged, then out again, an' off as fast as my legs could carry me. For somehow I was afraid of the old place. But if Joe can make it like he says for them to come from America – how long is it since they're gone?'

Sophie wasn't sure. 'Come to this cup o' tea,' she said.

After tea they went together to have a good look at what Megan called 'that big old house', which wasn't so big. Compared to Penydarren House and the other mansions of the place it was very small indeed. But it looked big standing by itself to one who had all her life lived in a Row one of many. So to Megan it was a very big house indeed.

It had two trees for one thing in the garden in front, the garden with a wall around, and a gate middle of the wall. From the gate to the front door of the house there was a gravel path with grass and weeds growing through the gravel now. There was as big a garden behind the house again, and that had a wall around it, too, but no back gate to that garden, which could only be reached by going through the back door of the house, or over the garden wall. In the gardens back and front all sorts of ancient things were annually renewing themselves without the aid of man. Spring onions of days gone by rising like swords above the garden wall, and many other vegetables, flowers and weeds sprang up and died down year after year. Untouched by hand for years and years, the gardens back and front were like the 'jungles' Joe had called them. Still, blossom is blossom, and green is green when it is the green of a weed, which is better than no green at all. For there was no green thing down in the Row, or in the hundreds of such Rows in the district.

The house now growing ivy had two windows each side the front door, two upstairs windows, and two downstairs windows. 'There'll be plenty windows to clean, Sophie,' said Megan, standing by the gate. 'Plenty time to clean 'em,' said Sophie. Tall windows and narrow they were, about four-feet tall, and two-feet wide. 'Let's see round the back,' said Megan. 'I've never seen the back o' the place.' Another four windows of the same size as those in front, at the back of the house. A small window left side the house made nine windows in all to keep clean. The small window side the house was too high up for looking out through, but it was handy for letting the daylight, sunlight, moonlight and starlight in to play about on the landing on top of the wide staircase. The walls of the stone house were eighteen inches thick, and the oak roof-timbers perhaps a foot through. 'A heavy old house,' people passing had said. Heavy? Well, it was solid, and sometimes the old house did look like a heavy-weight fighter facing all comers

in all weathers. For the ivy had grown like a moustache over the front door, and like eyebrows the ivy looked over the upstairs windows. This gave the house in certain lights a human appearance.

'More rooms than I thought,' said Megan, after looking around inside. 'Something to do to keep this place clean.'

'Well, we've nothing else to do that I know of,' Sophie said.

Upstairs there were three large bedrooms, and there was a little place full of smelly rubbish, in which, no doubt, a bed could find room if the place was cleared. Downstairs there were three fairly large rooms, a kitchen, and a pantry with a slabstone for curing sides of bacon on below the shelves, and firmly fixed into the oak rafters of the kitchen were hooks to receive sides of bacon and hams for drying and keeping. 'We'll have to keep pigs, Sophie,' said Megan taking stock of everything. 'Well, well, well, well, first time for me to see this old house properly. Yes, I think it can be made to look tidy. A tap for ourselves here, and inside the house too, Sophie, everything for ourselves here – oh, they've turned the water off,' she said after she had tried the tap. 'Well, there it is, Sophie. What do you think of it?' 'The house is right enough,' Sophie thought. 'Then let's see what Joe'll make of it. We'll have to go, or Susan will think we're not going to the theatre with her. Come on.' 'Wait till I bolt the back door,' Sophie said. Megan locked the front door, and as walking away from the house said: 'Them men Joe is getting to put the place tidy will want this key to come an' work, so we must keep it safe.'

Susan and the children were waiting for them to go to the little theatre which was situated in the old Penydarren works, just off the main road. 'We thought you wasn't coming,' shouted Susan's eldest boy. 'Shut up,' said Susan. Will, in his pit-clothes and with his pipe in his mouth in the doorway. Susan had given him his taters an' meat, put the water ready for him to wash, and was now

leaving him to look after the house whilst she and the children went to the theatre with Megan and Sophie to see what the new leading actor was like. Twice a week since she had had the bit o' money Megan took them all to the theatre. On the way she stopped near the shop on the corner to ask Susan's boys what they wanted. 'You know, bopa Megan,' they said. Yes, she knew what they all wanted by this time. Monkey nuts, oranges, apples, hard mixed rock, black shrimps – and soft jujubes for Sophie, who had only two teeth left, and they as far as the poles apart. With bags containing supplies in their hands they hurried towards the theatre. To-night it was *The Ticket of Leave Man*, and to-night was the first night for the new leading actor to appear here. The other leading actor who had been so popular with the Irish of the place had finished Saturday night with a bumper benefit. He finished up by playing 'Beamish McCoul' in *Arrah-na-Pogue*, the play the Irish of the place liked even better than they did *The Colleen Bawn*. Now that leading actor had gone to act elsewhere; some said that he had gone back to Dublin where they said he came from to act for us.

'Thruppernies full already,' said Megan, as she went to rise tickets for all to go into the sixpennies. 'Rise tickets' she said when she meant getting the tickets. The thruppennies behind the sixpennies were full to-night. On Friday nights it was only three-ha'pence was charged for admission into the thruppenny seats. For by Friday night there was very little money about for entertainment, and knowing that, the man who owned and managed and did the bill-posting and acted in the plays and farces which followed, reduced the price of admission to half-price on Friday nights. The man's daughter took the money until there was no sign of any more coming, then she shut the door and went on the stage to act. The man's wife she was mother, hag, old crone and things in the plays, and Susan said she did all the sewing of stage-clothes.

Susan liked this little theatre, but not the sixpenny seats

to which Megan, since the bit o' money came, always took her. Susan liked best the thruppenny seats at the back, where she could sit with other nursing mothers, and, like the rest, give the child the breast to keep him quiet. Yes, back there she liked to be with the children. Children in arms were as welcome as the flowers in May to this little theatre, but not to the Drill Hall or the Temperance Hall when those places were taken for a week at a time by companies that said on their bills that they had come direct from London. They were not at the Drill and Temperance Halls every week. Oh, no. The Drill Hall would be for as long as three months without anything more than a Calico Ball for the big people of the place – and the Volunteers drilling there when it was too wet for them to drill outside, of course. But the little wooden theatre in against what used to be the furnaces of the old Penydarren works was there all the time, and a woman could take her baby in the shawl there like if she was going into her own house.

But not to the Drill Hall and the Temperance Hall when plays came there, and on the bills they plastered the place with it said: 'Children in arms NOT admitted.' Sixpence was the lowest to go to the Drill Hall and the Temperance Hall when plays came to those places, and it was little a woman heard for her sixpence in the Drill Hall after taking the trouble to go there without her baby in the shawl. For in the Drill Hall they stuck the sixpenny benches right at the back, where the draught coming through the door at the bottom of the twisty stone steps was enough to give a woman her death o' cold. And it was little better in the sixpenny seats under the gallery of the Temperance Hall. Even when a woman was a-willin' to pay for the baby in the shawl they wouldn't let her in to either of those two Halls when plays came to 'em. Once when the Temperance Hall was taken by a man and his wife from London to act that play there was all that talk about, there was nothing about 'Children in arms NOT admitted' on the bills, but when Susan with her children went there it was only to be

turned away from the door. An' she was dying to see *The Vampire*, for that was the name of the play. 'Then where is a woman to have her baby if not in her arms?' she said to the man, who kept on saying: 'Outside, please.' So outside she had to go — she could have killed the man. She had bought oranges and nuts for the children and herself to eat inside, but it was outside whilst looking at the picture-posters that they ate them. The posters showed a green-faced man flying with wings outstretched down towards a woman dressed all in white and looking as frightened as anything. 'Is that the vulture, our mam?' the children asked. 'Yes, no doubt,' said Susan, looking enviously at women without children in arms passing her to go in. She stayed there till the man dressed like a lord stood on the steps shouting: 'Standing room only.' Then it was that Susan made a face at him before tightening the shawl round the baby. 'Come children,' she said to the others. 'But I want to see the vulture,' Owen started the others off crying. So she gave him something to cry for, and pushed him before her home the Tramroad way.

That was the last time she had gone a-near the Temperance or the Drill Halls. For years now she had been faithful to the more free and easy little wooden theatre, which she called 'our own theatre'. It was a cosy little place. When the house was full it seated about a hundred and fifty people, about eighty thruppennies, fifty sixpennies, and twenty shillings. Rough planking to sit on for thruppence, benches with backs to 'em for sixpence, and there were twenty chairs at a shilling. The house when full should have yielded approximately three pounds five shillings. But never a night did it yield that amount of cash, full to overflowing though the place has been many times. For children well able to walk were carried past the pay-box as a sort of makeweight to those bearing them, without anything being paid for them, yet as soon as they were inside they occupied seats at a dead loss of threepence or sixpence to the management; but those who bought tickets for the

shilling seats were, lucky for the management, above that sort of thing. Having regard to the many ways in which seats were occupied by those carried in, and for the half-price on Friday nights, perhaps ten pounds per week would be the weekly takings, week in, week out. The company was, except for the leading actor, a family affair, as the saying is. The owner, his wife and unmarried daughter, his married son, the son's wife and child, and – 'the leading actor', who is now causing the delay.

'They're late starting,' said Susan.

'Yes, they are, I've finished all my jujubes,' said Sophie, who then said to Susan's eldest boy: 'Give me some of your hard rock?' 'You had your jujubes, an' I didn't ask you for any of 'em,' he replied. 'I'll remember you, my boy,' said Sophie childishly.

The theatre was lit for people to see coming in and going out by an oil-lamp which was hanging by a chain from the roof. A table-lamp with a globe it was, but a tin collar worn below the glass oil container was holed for the chain, and so what was in the first place a table-lamp, was now a hanging-lamp. For footlights there were a few fat carriage-lamp candles set inside a tin guard bent the shape of a drain-pipe halved lengthways. This footlight guard was about six-feet long, and just before the play started the boss of the place came before the curtain to light with a match the footlight candles. When he appeared to do this everybody clapped their hands and stamped their feet.

The curtain was pictorial of two scenes, one inside the other. The centrepiece was a court scene, and all around that was a woodland scene with shepherds and nymphs. Behind this curtain, scene one of *The Ticket of Leave Man* was set ready to start – it was the scene that was of the ever-ready kind, for it was the only scene the company had to make houses, offices, palaces and things of. That and a drop-curtain was all they had. In the permanent set they played a scene, then down with the drop-cloth, in front of which a scene would be played. Then up with the drop-

cloth to play the next scene, and so on until the play and the farce which followed the play were both ended. It is the question of farces that is now holding things up.

The new leading actor who has been engaged at a salary of thirty shillings a week is refusing to play in farces. Says he's an actor. He'll play in the six plays put on each week, but not in the farces to follow. The owner-actor-manager, who was made up ready to play Hawkshaw, the detective, is pleading with him. The owner's daughter-in-law is ready to play May Edwards, her husband ready to play Melter Moss and a few other parts. He's the one who with the whiskers on rushes on to the stage shouting: 'He comes, he comes,' then runs off to unhook his whiskers before coming as announced by himself. The daughter has just brought the takings, hands them to her father, saying: 'The people in front will soon be asking for that money back if you don't heave the curtain up.'

'Get changed, you,' said her father. She went a little to the side to pull a trousers on before taking off her skirt, for she is playing Sam Willoughby, 'the Tiger', playing that and any other parts she may be called upon to play. She is a male impersonator, singer, dancer.

'I will not be persuaded,' the new leading actor is saying. 'No, I will not be made a clown of. I - I am an actor.'

'What do you think we are?' growled the son, made up as Melter Moss.

'Leave the gentleman to me, Harry,' said his father. 'Mr. Davenish, we're late as it is. Now, be reasonable -'

'I will not appear in farces.'

'But these people demand farces,' said the son.

'Most imperatively,' said his father.

'Then you must supply the demand without my aid,' said the new leading actor.

'Tell him to go to blazes, dad,' said the daughter as she braced the trousers she had drawn on. 'We can do without him. I'll double Brierly and the Tiger.'

'I'll double you if you don't shut up,' said her father. 'Come on, clear the stage - we'll cut that first bit where Brierly - Milly, you walk straight on and say -' He consulted the tattered playscript he was holding. 'Where is it now? Ah, yes, you say -'

About a minute later the curtain went up, then the noisy and restless audience simmered down with a long 'a-ah' of satisfaction.

It was eleven o'clock when Megan, Sophie, Susan and the children were leaving the theatre with the laugh of the farce still lingering about their faces. 'I don't think this leading actor's as good as the last one,' said Susan. 'This baby's as wet as a fish through the double-napkin I put on him....'

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Nine weeks Megan and Sophie had been living in the 'big house', as they called it, when the brothers Llewelyn and Elias, with their wives, Norah and Miriam, came back home from America to see their people and the old place after all these years. Yes, and the old house had cost Megan a pretty penny between everything. The carpenters, painters and paperhangers had been there for months before Joe sent up the beds and furniture he said he had bought for next to nothing down Cardiff. 'If that's next to nothing,' said Megan when she heard from him how much he had paid for the stuff, 'then it's a good job for me that it wasn't new things you bought.' 'It's better than new,' he assured her. For months Megan was, she said, 'doing nothing but signing my hand all time', meaning that she was signing cheques.

However, as looking over the place the day before her brothers and their wives were due to arrive - she had sent Joe all the way to Liverpool to meet them - she was both satisfied and proud. Susan had come up from the Row to see how nice the old place had been made ready for them coming from America. 'Lovely,' Susan said the old place looked. 'Do you think there's enough clothes on their beds,

Sophie,' said Megan. 'I wonder how many blankets they haves on their beds in America?'

'No more than you've got on them beds there, I'm sure,' said Sophie. 'Stop fussing, gel. 'Tisn't Queen Victoria is coming.'

'No, I've never seen anything like it,' said Susan. 'Oh, lovely you've got it, Megan.'

'It was our Joe that done it all; all I done was sign my hand.'

'Which is the main thing,' said Sophie.

'All I hope is that Joe meets the right boat,' said Megan. 'Susan, do I look very old?'

'Don't answer her, Susan,' said Sophie, 'for she have been asking that ever since she got up this morning.'

'Remember, Susan, as soon as Will comes home from work to wash hisself all over to-morrow night; come all of you up. I've told Norah's parents to be here to meet them – an' it wouldn't be much for that Moriah of ours to come from where she's singing to meet them. But Moriah she is. My head is splitting four ways, so put a cup o' tea for us all, Sophie.'

'I wonder you're not bad in bed the way you've fussed,' said Sophie.

Whilst they were having tea Susan said: 'Will was saying that the company are running an excursion to the sea at Swansea next Mabon's Monday, and pay through the office for the tickets. Will wants me an' all the children to go.'

'Then why don't you?' said Megan.

'What, little children on the old train?' cried Sophie, who had never in her life been on what she called 'the old train'.

'People goes on the train to everywhere now,' said Megan. 'Look at me going to London that time to sing with the Cor Mawr.'

'Why don't you eat something, gel,' said Sophie.

But Megan was too excited to eat much, too excited to sleep much that night, and the next day she was enough to drive Sophie mad. Laid the table, which was full of the

room, this way and that way. Seven o'clock Joe had sent from Liverpool to say they would arrive in Merthyr, but they didn't come at seven o'clock. The Delaneys came down from Penydarren as arranged. 'Not come yet?' said Dan. 'No, not yet,' said Megan. 'Sit down, they'll sure to be here in a minute.' At half-past seven Will, Susan and the children came. 'Not come yet?' said Will. 'No, not yet,' said Megan, beginning to wring her hands. 'Sit down, they'll sure to be here in a minute.' The baby was asleep in the shawl with Susan, Edwin the baby's name was. 'Put him upstairs on the bed out of the way,' suggested Sophie. 'But not on their beds,' Megan screamed to make everybody look. 'Put him on our bed, Sophie's an' mine,' she said less hysterically. 'Here it is nearly eight o'clock. I hope to God nothing have happened to the old train.'

'There's somebody now,' said Will, running out to see. It was Shon's pony and trap, with Shon driving. Being as they had not arrived he would drive back to the Castle Hotel to have the pony rubbed down and fed and bedded after his fast trot up from Pontypridd, where Shon had been selling for some time now. 'Let me come down in the trap with you, Uncle Shon?' cried little Shon, Will's boy. 'Hand him up, Will,' said Shon.

'P'raps the fault is on the ship, not the train,' Susan said after putting the baby upstairs. 'For the train is on dry land.' They sat around being made fidgety by Megan's fidgeting. Shon and little Shon came back up from the Castle Hotel on foot. 'Not here yet?' said Shon. Megan shook her head.

Nearly half-past eight it was when Will cocked his ears and said: 'Here they are now then for sure.' From outside he shouted: 'Yes, two cabs with luggage on top coming. This is 'em.' Megan couldn't move from where she was stood looking so foolish in her relief. She held on to the mantelpiece listening for the voices of those who for ten years now - Now she could hear them. Yes, their voices, strangely flavoured now, but unmistakably theirs. 'Where

is she, where is she?' two men were crying, and tears robbed her of her sight. Blind she was in the arms of two men joy-broken, crying 'Megan annwyl, oh Megan annwyl.' Now she could see them. Yes, Llew' an' 'Lias right enough. . . .

'And we're here, too,' cried the fat woman who spoke with Miriam's voice. It was Miriam. She ran to embrace her. Norah, the same dear Norah, was between her father and mother in the corner. Her mother Norah held fast, Dan looking at them trying not to be as soft as the two of 'em. Luggage from the top of the cabs being carried in. 'Put it there for now,' Joe was saying to the cabbies. 'Come now everybody to food,' Sophie was saying. 'They must have a bit of a wash first, Sophie, come with me the four of you now.' Megan led the way upstairs. 'You an' Llew' in here, Norah – in here you an' 'Lias, Miriam – same exactly the rooms are. Same furniture an' everything. Joe bought it all two the same at Cardiff. You didn't say in the letter which you sleeps between, sheets or blankets out there in America. Anyway, I've put you between sheets, but if you'd rather between blankets, then take the sheets off an' put 'em in one o' them drawers out o' the way – there's water in them jugs ready for you to wash. You'll find combs an' brushes – an' mind whatever you do to be careful with these blinds over the windows. Joe says they're all the go down Cardiff, but go or not I've had to sprag the one in where me an' Sophie sleeps already. Hurry up now for to come an' have food, for I'm sure you want it after all the hours on the old train.'

Between the two rooms she ran to and fro talking. 'Don't make more row than you can help, for Susan's baby is in where I sleeps on the bed. You remember Susan, Will's wife?' They were not quite sure. 'Of course you do; was they married before you went to America?' They were not sure of that either. 'Sure to be, for with the baby they've got five children now, an' all boys they are. Are you ready now then?' They were.

'I don't see our Moriah here,' said Llewelyn when they got

down to where all the others were. ‘She’s on a concert tour at present,’ said Shon. ‘Yes, I told you as coming down in the train,’ said Joe. ‘But you’ll see her and hear her when she comes to Cardiff to sing –’ ‘Yes, but never mind Moriah now,’ said Megan. ‘Come to food all of you.’

All round the big table at last – well, all except Sophie and Susan’s baby. The baby, he was upstairs sleeping fast, thank goodness, and Sophie she was tending on the others. Busy cutting for ‘em all, an’ making tea all time. Megan said sit down and I’ll get it, Sophie, but Sophie said you sit down now that they are here, for you’ve been like a – ‘Is there any coffee?’ Miriam asked. ‘Coffee?’ said Sophie, standing with the big teapot in her hand. ‘Same as they do go to drink in the Coffee Tavern down by the Market, do she mean?’ Sophie said, looking at Megan. ‘It doesn’t matter, perhaps tea will be as well,’ said Miriam. ‘If it’s coffee you likes best, then we’ll send down to the Coffee Tavern for a jugful to-morrow first thing.’ Shon laughed, and Will said he had heard a chap back from the army talking about mixing rum and coffee. In all there were sixteen sitting down to food at the same time at the same table, and Megan was glad now that Joe had made her keep the big old table which was full o’ the room. Llew’, being the eldest living member of the family, was at the head of the table, with ‘Lias at the other end facing him. Norah she sat between her mother and father, Dan and Peg Delaney. Megan she sat next to Miriam, who had no parents, for the Cholera of ’59 had had them. Joe he sat between two of Will’s boys, and Shon he sat between the other two. Will and Susan sat next each other. All except Megan eating an’ talking away like anything. ‘Why don’t you eat something yourself, gel?’ said Sophie in Megan’s ear. ‘I am eating.’ ‘You’re not.’ ‘Norah wants some more tea,’ Megan told her.

Megan was feasting her eyes instead of eating. Looking first at Llew’, who was getting grey. Then at ‘Lias, who was going bald. At Miriam that used to be so slight, and

was now so fat, an American-grown chin touching her bust, now enormous. Norah, the ladylike one. She's not altered much – and yet she is. They have all altered considerably. Megan couldn't say how, but she was struck by the difference between 'them from that side of the water' and 'us here', as she silently put it. Those from over the water sat squarer, she thought, seemed wider, their features and bodies, for the ten years spent in America. Less cramped their appearance than ours on this side all time. It must be only the look of them, for Llew' an' 'Lias are speaking Welsh as well as ever they did. 'Llew' speaks Welsh as good as before he went,' said Megan to Norah across the table. 'Why shouldn't he?' said Norah, smiling. 'Tis all Welsh people and Welsh chapels where we are out there. 'Tis said that there are more Welsh people in America now than there are left in Wales.'

'Never,' said Megan.

There was a loud knocking at the front door. 'I'll go,' said Sophie, as Megan was about to get up. Sophie returned from the front door with a basket divided into four compartments, each of which held a pint-and-a-half bottle of wine. 'Did you,' said Sophie, glaring at Shon, 'tell them down at the Castle Hotel to send this drink up here?'

'Yes – it's only a drop of port and sherry,' he explained to Megan. 'I thought a glass to celebrate the return –'

'If it's the same as Shon gave me one night in the Castle,' said Will, 'then it's grand stuff.'

'Put them down by there, Sophie,' said Megan.

'The boy's waiting for the basket, an' if it was me had the say here he'd take the bottles back, too,' said Sophie.

'Don't talk so dull, it's like milk,' Will said.

'A glass of port,' said Joe, rising to take the bottles out of the basket, 'is just what we all require. A happy thought, Shon. Have we a corkscrew?' Sophie shut her mouth fast as she went out to the boy with the empty basket. 'A corkscrew,' said Megan, bringing glasses. 'Where is that corkscrew, Sophie?' Sophie returning from the front door

said: 'In the same drawer where it always is.' 'Then get it for Joe.' 'Not to open drink before children, I won't.' 'Get it, Megan,' said Joe. Shon passed cigars around to the men whilst Joe filled the glasses. 'Now the place is like a public-house,' grumbled Sophie as she started clearing the table. At Joe's suggestion the health of 'our American visitors' was wetted. 'There, what did I tell you?' said Will after he had tossed his off, and was handing Joe the empty glass for re-filling. 'Like milk it is.' 'Produce your cork, brother,' said little Shon, pointing at Will, his father. From his pocket Will produced a cork, saying to the boy: 'Thought to get another fine out o' me, did you?' Those from America looked inquiringly, and Will explained that he was a member of the hauliers' Cork Club, and that his boys were always reminding him about carrying his cork lest he be fined the price of a pint for not having it on him when meeting a fellow-member who would call upon him to produce it. 'Here you are,' said Joe, handing Will the glass he had re-filled. The four bottles were soon emptied, and nobody any the worse for the drop they had taken.

What a night it was. Between twelve and one Sophie said: 'I'm going to my bed, anyway.' She went. Susan went upstairs with her to fetch the baby who had slept through it all, all the singing and talking downstairs. Susan, Will and the children went back down to their home in the Row, Norah and Llew' went to 'send' Norah's parents as far as where they lived in Penydarren. 'Lias an' Miriam went up to bed, Joe said he must be going, for he was staying at the Castle Hotel, where Shon was staying, Joe staying the night there because Megan was full up with these from America. 'Are you coming down to the hotel,' said Joe to Shon. 'Not just yet. I'll stay company for Megan until Llew' and Norah return from Penydarren.' 'See you at breakfast in the morning perhaps,' said Joe. 'Will you be coming up here before you go on the train back to Cardiff, Joe bach?' said Megan. No, he'd already been too long away from the office, and what his partner

would think – ‘Well, good-bye for now, then,’ said Megan as he went.

‘You look tired,’ said Shon, lighting another cigar.

‘I am tired,’ Megan said, looking into the fire. After a bit she said: ‘Getting old, that’s what it is, I expect.’

‘Old?’ he said, looking at her. He shook his head. ‘No, not old, Megan fach.’

‘I’m nearer forty than thirty, so that isn’t young. An’ the rheumatics I gets as well.’

‘Then in that case I must be very old, for I shall be fifty before you’re forty.’

She sat looking into the fire full the high and wide five-barred grate, the grate it took Sophie nearly half the morning to clean. Into the red heart of the black banked-up fire she sat looking. ‘Moriah might have come to meet ’em,’ she murmured.

‘The concert – her contract,’ Shon murmured.

‘Something all time with Moriah. She could be in America too for all I ever see of her.’

‘When you do see each other you’re not what . . .’

‘Not what?’ she pressed.

‘Well, you’re not long together before you get on each other’s nerves.’

‘More her fault than mine then. She talking her high English at me all time. She an’ Joe. . . . P’raps it’s the schoolin’ – or p’raps it’s me not having schoolin’ do make me nasty when they talk like they do. I don’t know which it is. All the same, I’d like to see her now an’ then. She could, after these have gone back to America, stop here with me instead of going to that Castle Hotel. Oh, won’t they lock you out o’ the Castle if you stay company for me till Llew’ an’ Norah come?’

Shon chuckled. ‘No fear. And what if they did lock me out, and I with nowhere to go came back here? Would you take me in?’

‘No doubt I would. How’re you sellin’ down Pontypridd? Better than in Merthyr?’

'I'm doing all right there. Pontypridd's a good centre. A pay-Saturday there is like a big fair. For they're down from the Aberdare and Rhondda valleys, and they clear me out in no time.'

'So you're making plenty money all time.'

'I'm doing all right. You're not doing so bad either. All this property -'

'All what property are you talking about? A few old houses at four shillings a week rent.'

'A few? Joe told me that -'

'Joe had better keep his mouth shut then. What odds to anybody how many houses I've got? Plenty to do with my bit o' rent. I gives the rent of one house to my chapel every Sunday like the clock. I don't forget my chapel if she do. Never have she offered to sing in a chapel concert for the chapel where she was first learnt to sing.'

'Moriah, do you mean?'

'Who else?'

Shon chuckling said: 'Moriah's not interested much in chapels nowadays.'

'Don't I know it. Only of herself she thinks. I was left to look after the home, an' out o' my bit o' money Joe was made fit to be what he is to-day. Not a penny from her.'

'Now, fair play, Megan fach. I heard her myself offer to pay share -'

'What odds about her? Why do you keep talking about her all time? I don't want to talk about her.' Then after a bit she said: 'When did *you* see her last?'

'Let me see -'

'Never mind seeing. If a man's got to say "let me see" before he can remember when he seen his own wife last, then it must be a long time. You don't get much chance to quarrel, the two of you.'

'Perhaps not, but when we're together we agree as well as most married couples do.'

'Humph, I know how you agree. She the fine lady, an' you carrying her fan, and seeing all her things right on the

train. She've got the upper-hand of you for sure. Better if you had bought a shop in Merthyr, and made her live in it with you. Now she goes about living in old hotels all time. An' no doubt there's men going about them hotels – have she ever told you about any men botherin' her in them places?"

Shon shook his head. 'Moriah's well able to look after herself.'

'No, no woman away from her husband all time can look after herself all time. What's a husband for if not to look after his wife? Two people without chick or child, an' plenty money you've got too, playing send the fool further over the world. One going the one way, the other the other. Without sense to live together tidy. Look at Will an' Susan like Darby an' Joan most o' the time, an' only his bit o' haulier's money to live on. Houseful o' children to keep; an' then there's these from America to see us. Thinks the world of each other they do. When Llew' an' 'Lias went first to America, wasn't Norah an' Miriam here breaking their hearts till they went out there to 'em. Plenty o' children they've got, too. But you an' Moriah . . . I don't know what to make of you. One singing, the other selling. It's when you've stopped selling, an' she can't sing any more, an' the two o' you'll be old like Dan an' Peg Delaney, it's then – but what's the use botherin'? Shall I make you a cup o' tea before you go?'

'If you please.'

She made the tea, and was pouring some into two cups when Llew' and Norah returned after 'sending' Norah's parents as far as where they lived up in Penydarren. Eyes so bright – and they would have a cup of tea, too, please. They had stood, they said, here and there on the road, to watch the furnace lights of Dowlais and Cyfarthfa. For a while after landing in America, Llew' said, he and 'Lias had missed the furnace lights of home.

'We went,' said Norah, 'to take a look at the little house we lived in before going to America.' Small it seemed now

in comparison with the fine house they had in America, the home in the new world which her daughter soon to be married out there was looking after until her parents returned from their visit to the old country. Shon and Megan sat silent listening to Llew' and Norah talking about Scranton, Philadelphia - 'The week before sailing to come to you, we went a family party from Scranton to Philadelphia to see Henry Irving act,' said Norah. 'Fine city, Philadelphia.'

'Fine actor, Irving,' said Shon. 'I went from where I was doing business at the time to see him play Shylock the Jew in the Cardiff Theatre Royal. Whilst you're over here we might make a family party to go to the Cardiff Theatre Royal. How long are you going to stay over here?'

'About six weeks - that's if Megan will have us that long,' said Norah.

'For as long as you like,' said Megan.

'I want to hear our Moriah singing at a concert more than acting,' said Llew'.

'It's sleep I think we all wants more than anything else just now,' said Megan.

Next morning what Megan for years afterwards referred to as 'the great gallivant' started in earnest. Off to somewhere every day. The first Sunday evening after the arrival of the two couples from America, Megan marched a strong family party to Zoar. All the family except Norah, who had been to early Mass with her parents, and was now spending the evening with them, and Moriah who was off somewhere singing, or rather resting in some hotel after singing the night before, all except Norah and Moriah on the way to Zoar with Megan, she with the four shillings, the weekly rent of one of her houses, in the envelope in her hand held fast. Like a regiment they marched to Zoar. There was Joe up from Cardiff, Shon up from Pontypridd, Llew' an' 'Lias over from America, and Will who's never been out o' the place. Five men. Then Will's five boys,

Susan carrying the youngest in the shawl. Five boys. Then Megan, Sophie, Susan, and Miriam. Four women.

'We'd better go upstairs being as we're so many,' said Megan.

Upstairs to what was called 'the gallery' they went to fill three seats one behind the other. The seats were made to hold five, and in the front seat Megan sat with two brothers on her left, and two brothers on her right. In the next seat behind sat Susan and Miriam and the three youngest of Susan's boys, Susan herself with the baby in the shawl sitting at the end, from where she could without disturbing anyone rise and make her way out in the event of the baby boy in her arms not liking the service. In the seat behind that sat Shon and Sophie and Susan's eldest two boys.

It was strange how the four brothers happened to flank their sister Megan at what might be called 'a re-union service'. It was not by arrangement that they did so, it just happened. The chapel was crowded as usual, and when the preacher appeared from the little room behind the pulpit, Megan whispered to Llew' an' 'Lias: 'There's John Thomas, our preacher. Wait till you hear him.'

The first hymn was one of the few truly joyous Welsh hymn-tunes, and in the singing of it the four brothers, two each side Megan, buttressed their voices tenor and bass around her lovely soprano to form part of the harmonic defence the congregation as a whole erected against the sea of sin for ever threatening God's house and its people. Through eyes tear-misted the brothers seemed to see as they sang the mother who had sang before them, the mother that was suffered to go unto Him a little child in the fiftieth year of her age. Their flood-taken father they felt near, and their two brothers blown before by the first and last Gethin explosions they thought they could see with the father who had belted them with the buckle-end. Mother, father, Owen and Sam, moving beautiful about them. All of them soft as butter seeing things, and Joe the business

man as bad as any. Maybe it was the old chapel, if not the chapel then Megan's voice so like her mother's, or Will's voice, so like his father's. The two who were in America when the flood took their father melted under it all. After the hymn had been sung, the last verse three times, the ones from America sat wiping their eyes. Welshmen back from America are that way about their chapels. Look at William Lloyd of Bethesda Chapel, Merthyr. He could never forget his old chapel. Out there in Philadelphia doing well, but never forgetting the old chapel at the bottom of the British Tip. Left money to it, money to help the poorest members of his old chapel. Welshmen everywhere were sentimental about the old meeting-house at home, so perhaps Llew' an' 'Lias here in Zoar for the first time in ten years — and after going up to the Cefn the day before with Megan to see 'our graves' — can be excused this once for shedding tears in front of people.

'We've got a Zoar Chapel out there too,' 'Lias said as they were on the way home to Megan's after the service.

'But this of ours is *the* Zoar,' Megan said, and the brothers from America nodded their heads in agreement.

As soon as they were outside the chapel they re-aligned themselves, so to speak. Will, carrying his youngest but one, little Shon named after his Uncle Shon who was so free with his money, Will carrying little Shon, walked at Susan's side, she with the baby who had been so good this evening, for a wonder, in the shawl. Behind them 'Lias an' Miriam, behind those two Llew' and Megan, and behind them two again, Joe and Shon. Last but not least, Sophie shepherding Will's three eldest boys. It was slow progress through the street so crowded with people just out of chapel, especially with people who knew Llew' an' 'Lias. All the time someone shouting, 'Well, well, well, well, Llew' bach, how are you after all these years? An' 'Lias, how are you, boy bach?'

They all went up to Megan's after chapel, and it was late that night again before Shon and Joe left to go to where

they were staying at the Castle Hotel. On the Tuesday Llew' an' 'Lias went on the train to Swansea to see Dr. Parry, but Norah and Miriam they stayed home to go in the evening with Megan and Susan and Sophie and the children to the little wooden theatre to see *The Shaughraun*. Llew' an' 'Lias said they wouldn't be easy in their minds till they had been to Swansea to pay their respects to Dr. Parry. 'For him and us sang boys together in old Rosser Beynon's choir,' said 'Lias, as he and Llew' always did when there was talk of the now famous Dr. Parry. 'Well,' said Miriam, who had heard 'Lias say it so often, 'me and Norah didn't sing boys together with Dr. Parry, so we'll stay home with Megan to go with her to the theatre to-night.' 'It's not much of a theatre, remember,' said Megan. 'It'll do,' said Miriam.

'Round like a top all time I'm going,' Megan said to Sophie the day she was getting ready to go with 'them', as she referred to the American visitors, with whom she was this afternoon getting ready to go on the train to Cardiff 'to hear my lady sing. If it wasn't for these here with me from America, she'd come to Merthyr before I'd pay to hear her sing. But I don't want to make any old bother whilst they're here with me. Humph, told Joe that she mustn't be disturbed until after the concert. Well done, Moriah fach. It isn't me that would be disturbing her at all if it wasn't that her two brothers and their wives here all the way from America – an' I've got more looks on them than to spoil a minute of the time they're here. But if they wasn't here, I'd tell my lady something. Wouldn't I?'

It was Joe sent the letter to say that Moriah had written to tell him that on no account would she see anyone until after the concert was over, her part in it, anyway. Then she would be only too delighted to see them all at her hotel. 'Her hotel', said Megan. Will said no, he wouldn't come, he'd stay home to mind the house for Susan to go. It would mean him having to ask to leave the pit early, then on top of that it would mean about six hours' confinement in sham-

front and collar. 'No, let Susan go.' 'What about the baby?' said Susan. Sophie said that she would look to the baby. Feed him on sop till Susan returned to feed him properly. 'Well, one of you must come, for Joe have paid for the tickets,' said Megan. 'All right,' Susan said. 'I'll give him a good feed just before I go.'

That's how it was. Joe, in shiny black clothes Megan was seeing for the first time, was at Cardiff railway station like he said in the letter to meet the train. Wearing a box-hat as well, and what Susan called a 'sham-front and collar' on. 'Joe bach, where did you get them clothes from?' said Megan. 'Shut up,' he said. Outside the station, standing by some cabs, Shon was standing dressed same as Joe. 'Well, well, well, well,' said Megan. 'Get in,' said Joe. 'Why, is it too far for us to walk?' said Megan. 'If it's no further than from the Merthyr station up to our house, then the walk'll do us good after riding in the old train.' Joe pushed her into the cab and shut the door on her whilst he put the others in their cabs. Miriam being so fat had to go sideways into the cab. Megan, dressed in the same white dress she wore to sing with the choir in the Merthyr National Eisteddfod that time, waited in the cab for Joe to come for her to talk to him about the way he was spending on cabs an' everything. 'Right, Public Hall,' said Joe to the driver of the cab in front, and away the Merthyr-American cavalcade went. As Joe jumped in to sit opposite Megan she started: 'You're spending fine, ain't you, Joe bach?' 'Sometimes,' he said, his box-hat off his head now in his hand, 'sometimes you make me feel ashamed of you. When I arrange a thing -'

'Arrange without wasting money then,' she said. 'Spending money on old cabs.'

'It isn't your money I'm spending. People in Cardiff don't walk to the Musical Society's concerts.'

'Joe bach, people won't walk a step before long.' She looked at him approvingly. 'Them new clothes looks grand on you.'

'Think so?' he said, brushing his moustache left and right with the white glove he was holding.

'Grand indeed. Put your box-hat on for me to see again.'

'Can't wear this hat properly in a cab.'

'Are we nearly there?'

'Almost,' he said, looking out. 'Long line of cabs in front.'

'I hope them others won't go on lost. You should have put Susan in here with me.'

'How was I to know what you'd say in front of her?'

'Whatever I say, she's one of the family, an' Susan, fair-play for her, is not mouthy like some.' The cab stopped, and Joe stepped out to help her out after him. Two policemen, one of whom had whiskers like Henry Richard – whose health Megan had heard was none too good these days – were shouting the cabs forward and out of the way. 'Come here to me, Susan,' shouted Megan, but Shon was looking after Susan as well as Llew' an' 'Lias were looking after their wives. Joe led the way into the hall with Megan on his arm like if she was a proper lady. Near the door, just inside, he took off his hat to hand it with the overcoat off his arm to a man in a place where there was nothing but hats and coats. Shon, Llew' an' 'Lias left some of their things there as well. Norah, who was the most at home of the women in such a place, led the way to the ladies' place, then back down to the hallway to join their men. Joe was pointing out to the other three those he called 'the merchant princes of Cardiff'. After a bit Megan said: 'What are we standing here for?' 'Plenty of time,' said Joe, wanting to impress Shon and his two brothers from America with his talk of 'the merchant princes of Cardiff'; he had, he informed his hearers in an undertone, sold a house near St. Andrew's Church to the man over there – no, the man with white hair standing between those two girls in green. Big man down the docks. They say that the train for the docks in the morning never starts until he's on it. Ten minutes

late waiting for him some mornings. Big man. And there's another big man down the docks, that tall man –

'Can't we go in to sit down,' said Megan.

'Oh, come along,' said Joe, with the tickets in his hand. He bought them each a programme on which the name 'MADAME MORIANA' was in bigger type than all the rest printed on it. Megan doubled the programme from both ends until all she could see to look at was 'MADAME MORIANA'. That was all she wanted to see, it was the platform and stage-name of the only one she wanted to hear. Pride, resentment, she was filled with alternately, but pride stayed longest. Affectionate pride. Of Moriah she thought whilst an orchestra played an overture to something. It ended with a crash, and the conductor turned about to acknowledge the applause. Megan leaned forward in her seat. Would *she* be the next – she was too excited to look at the programme, and the noise in her head prevented her from hearing what Joe was saying. She came, majestically Moriah came to stand to the right of the conductor in front of the orchestra. Confidently, with a faint smile on her lips, she waited for the applause to die down. 'She's – she's lovely,' Megan soundlessly said. All in white satin she stood, white satin billowing over the bustle to fall like a waterfall to the ground about a yard from where she stood like an ivory tower. Her train, as some say. She had showing through the cutaway front of the satin outer dress, an underskirt of satin. The bodice of her dress was short-sleeved, and it was low-cut in front. The bodice and dress one piece with tight-lacing from the bust down to where the cutaway of the outer skirt began. Her hair, her lovely, shiny, black hair she wore low on her forehead in front, and behind it was twisted into the shape of a bun to rest on the nape of her neck. She stood with her hands lightly held one in the other in front of her skirt, where the cutaway started. Megan could only wonder. She had thought that she would have cried when seeing Moriah after so long, but nobody, be they ever so tender-hearted,

coul'a cry at the sight of the woman as cool and unperturbed as a statue of marble on the platform before the orchestra. . . .

The conductor raises his baton, and Megan she waited for the voice, the voice to which in the night long lost she had joined hers. Cheap Jack's place, an audience of brickyard gels, gels from the pit-heads, the works — The voice like a noble river's majestic flow came. Megan sat swallowing hard. Martha Harries she had heard, other contraltos she had heard, but this was Moriah singing all the others out of her mind. The words were Italian, but to Megan the words didn't matter much. It was Moriah's voice.

The audience enthusiastically applauding as Moriah gracefully kicked her train about, before she turned about to walk off the platform out of sight, only to be recalled time after time by the applause. Megan couldn't for the life of her join in the applause. Stately exit after stately exit — 'Where did she learn to walk like that?' Miriam asked herself — gracious entry after gracious entry until at last she stood where she had stood to sing what she was being applauded for, and nodded to the conductor, who turned about to say that Madame Moriana would now oblige with the arietta 'Caro mio ben' by Giordani. Her voice again. Loud and prolonged applause. Next a tall young man whose black hair ran to ringlets came on to sing in Italian, to sing leaning forward towards the audience, instead of solid on his feet like our Moriah — 'Let 'em call her what they like on their programmes.' Under his moustache so black and silky the young man now occupying the platform had a mouthful of luscious tenor voice, with which he many times did a sort of disappearing trick. First he would send his voice out big towards the audience, then draw it back to die away like a baby's cry in his throat. Each time he did this trick his round eyes became rounder with wonder, as though he were saying: 'However did I manage to do it?' He bowed his acknowledgment of the

applause – ‘Of course it is,’ said Megan aloud under cover of the applause, remembering when she had last seen the young man. He was with Moriah in Merthyr that time the National Eisteddfod was there, and didn’t he bow like that when he came forward to kiss her hand that day she went to ‘send’ Moriah as far as the railway station – ‘Who’s this now then?’

It was Jack Foley, better known as Signor Foli, coming on to sing in English ‘The Wolf’ and after that ‘The Gallants of England’. From deep down the notes came up to the famous basso-profundo’s mouth to be rolled forward at the audience. After him came a soprano to help restore the audience’s self-respect, which Signor Foli had shattered by singing two, *two* songs in the language of the country. An overdose of one’s native language at a concert could be very injurious. Having regard to that the soprano sang two chippy pieces in Italian. The first part of the concert ended with the four singers lined up singing the quartette from *Rigoletto* in Italian.

‘Come along,’ Joe was saying, ‘I’ve cabs waiting to take us to Moriah’s hotel.’ The second half of the concert was the orchestral half, he explained. To the hotel in cabs they all went, Megan on the way calculating how much the ‘old train’ and ‘these cabs’ and the tickets would come to altogether. Moriah in a different dress in which she looked ever so much stouter than she had when singing in the white satin dress, was waiting to receive them graciously – too graciously, Megan, before she had been in her company a minute, was thinking. The other singers were there, and on a sideboard there was plenty food of all sorts to eat in your hand standing up, and drink to drink for them who wanted it. After a while Megan stood back to watch and listen resentfully. Around Moriah ‘them from America’ were stood admiring, and wanting to know from her when she was coming to America to sing.

‘America,’ Moriah moaned melodiously, ‘America,’ she repeated with more voice to secure the attention of all

present. 'That wretch,' she said, pointing with her fan at a dapper little middle-aged man of foreign appearance who stood with a chicken sandwich in one hand and a glass of wine in the other, 'that wretch has made arrangements for me to be dragged through at least a dozen states of America.'

'Including Pennsylvania, we hope,' said Norah.

The little man with the black spade-beard put his empty wine-glass down and came forward smacking his lips to assure Madame's American relatives that she was appearing twice at Philadelphia.

'Who's he then to say where she must go?' Megan in the background asked herself, not knowing that the man was Moriah's agent. 'Isn't it time to go to the train?' she asked Joe as he was passing with more wine in the glass for the soprano he had been talking to all time. 'Plenty of time,' said Joe. 'Have you had something to eat and drink?' 'I've had all I want — thank you for asking,' Megan said flatly. Here I'm nothing, it's she's everything, she stood thinking. Every now and again Moriah herself, or one of the singers, or relatives, would try to thaw her, but they all failed. Susan stood with Shon seemed to be at home by the way she was laughing and stuffing herself with them sandwiches — and that's the second glass of that stuff she's had too.

Having soon reached the limit of her small stock of patience, she went forward to where 'them from America' were fluttering around Moriah. 'Time for the train,' she said. 'Joe said —' 'Never mind what Joe said,' she told 'Lias, 'I said it's time for the train.' 'Aren't you feeling —' 'I'm feeling grand — thank you for asking,' she told Moriah. 'But I'm watching for them not to lose the train, that's all. Susan have got to get up in the morning to send Will to work, and there's her children to look to.' Moriah had moved away, fanning herself; and Joe he said 'Excuse me' to the soprano he was still talking to, to come forward to ask why the hurry? He had the cabs waiting, so it

wouldn't take them more than a few minutes to get to the station.

'Cabs again?' cried Megan. Then she swallowed the rest about cabs. 'All right, let's go in them to the station now. Came to hear the singing we did, not for food. Plenty of food in my house. Come if you're coming. Better say good night to her, I s'pose.'

She went first towards where Moriah was now stood with the other singers. 'Patti?' she was saying. 'A most insufferable creature. Sings divinely, but behaves -'

'We're going now, Moriah,' said Megan, interrupting, and speaking for the rest of her party. 'I liked you singing. You know where I live if ever you come to Merthyr. Good night.' Then she turned about and walked out of the room. Outside in the cab she sat waiting until the others came. In the cab on the way to the station Joe told her. Didn't he? And now that the cab was bearing her away from Moriah, Megan began to feel sorry for the way she had behaved. But she wouldn't say 'sorry' to Joe. All she said was: 'That Patti she was talking about is a soprano, isn't she?' 'Of course she's a soprano,' Joe said. 'But what has -' 'I'd like to hear her, that's all. If you hear of her coming to sing here in Cardiff, buy two tickets for me an' Sophie to come. For I'm a soprano too. Yes, soprano I am,' she repeated childishly, tears not far away - 'But what odds what I am?' she asked Joe fiercely. 'You get the tickets if Patti comes.'

CHAPTER XVI

HOME SWEET HOME

LEW' an' Lias an' their wives had a grand time, for the weather was grand all the time they were here. Two days' rain was all they had during the six weeks they were here. The last week of their stay Norah spent most of with her parents, only leaving them to come to sleep at Megan's. Nearly breaking her heart Norah was now the time for her to go back to her home in America, leaving her parents, Dan and Peg Delaney, in Penydarren. Had it not been that her own fine half-Irish half-Welsh children were waiting for their mother over the water, it's doubtful whether she would have left her parents to go back to America.

Again everybody with the exception of Moriah were at the railway station, Joe was going as far as Liverpool with them because Megan insisted. He had got two tickets for a Patti concert to be held in Swansea, not Cardiff, for Megan. 'It may be years before she comes to Cardiff,' he told Megan. 'Never mind about the old tickets now,' said Megan. 'You mind to see your brothers an' their wives safe on the old ship.'

She had made him come up from Cardiff, made Will stay home from work, made Susan keep the children from school, 'for us all to "send" them as far as the station.' Dan and Peg Delaney were there trying to comfort their Norah, who would not be comforted. 'Where are those boys, Will?' cried Susan. 'Gone up in front to have a look at the engine.' 'Then go an' fetch them back here,' said Megan, 'for it's your brothers an' their bopas from America

they was kept home from school to "send", not the engine.' 'What I'm afraid is that they'll be under the engine,' said Susan. 'Remember,' said Llew' to Megan, 'remember what you said about coming to America to see us. I'll book the passage and send you the ticket -' 'No, no, not till I say,' said Megan. 'We'll see after a bit.' 'That's not fair, Megan,' said Miriam, 'for you said yes you'd come last night.' 'No doubt I'll come some time.' 'Stay here now, do you hear?' cried Susan as Will returned with the boys who had been admiring the engine.

Shon - not little Shon, remember - was pushing a box of cigars in 'Lias's hand; and the time was going on. Same as before it was again. Everybody kissing and shaking hands and saying 'Yes, I'll write.' Old Peg Delaney, who was none too well, hanging on old Dan's arm, for the excitement and farewelling had made her she could hardly stand. 'Them boys are gone up by the old engine again, Will,' cried Susan. 'Stop botherin' about 'em all time,' Megan cried, her eyes on the guard. 'But if one of 'em falls under the engine,' said Susan, 'I'll never - Go, Will,' she shrieked as the guard blew his whistle. 'Come along,' cried Joe, standing by the open door of the compartment. 'Up in front them boys are.' 'Shut up, Will's gone for 'em, ain't he?' Up in front Will shouting: 'Come quick before they're gone' to his boys. 'Let's stay to see the engine start first,' said Owen, the eldest. 'Yes, dad,' cried the others. 'Go, before I -' 'It's moving,' cried little Shon. 'There, why didn't you come when I told you?' said Will, clipping them as the train moved out. 'Watch by here now to wave to your uncles.'

'Come on,' said Sophie, pulling Megan, who was standing like a woman in a trance looking after the train. 'Yes, may as well,' she said flat as a pancake. 'God help 'em,' she said as turning she saw Dan and Peg Delaney with nobody now. To the two old people she went. 'Sophie wants you to have a bit o' dinner with us to-day,' she said though Sophie had said no such thing. 'Come on, we'll

go up on the bus,' she said, taking Peg Delaney's other arm.

'Put these two tickets somewhere safe,' she said to Sophie when she reached the house. 'Peg, you rest on the couch a bit. Dan, you go an' see how that garden in the back is looking. Everything coming on grand. . . .'

'Tickets for what are these then?' said Sophie as Dan went out to see the garden and smoke his pipe.

'For me an' you to go to Swansea to hear that Madame Patti sing. Put 'em safe in that drawer with the rent-books an' things.'

'For us to go on the old train do you mean?' said Sophie, who had never been on the train.

'Of course, for we can't walk to Swansea.'

'Then I'm not going,' said Sophie.

Megan tried hard many times during the weeks that followed, but Sophie said: 'No, I tell you again. Never have I been on the old train, an' I'm too old to start going with it now. Take Susan, I'll look to the baby an' the house for her to go.'

Susan, now that she had had taste of going about, for she enjoyed herself grand that night in Cardiff when Moriah was singing there, was glad of the chance to go with Megan to hear Madame Patti, who was singing in Swansea in the afternoon, not in the night. Before twelve o'clock, before the children came home from school to their dinners, they had to leave Merthyr to get to Swansea in time for the concert in the Albert Hall there.

Between everything that day cost Megan over a sovereign, for she paid for everything. But it was worth it, she thought, if only for the memory of Madame Patti singing 'Home Sweet Home', which to Megan was worth all the foreign songs Madame Patti and the singers she had with her sang.

After the concert she and Susan went to sit on the sands in the sun whilst they ate the food they had brought with them, and drank the bottle o' pop bought off one of the standings stood where you cross the railway crossing to go

down to the sands. Sophie had made them take food in paper. 'Then you won't have to go to any old cookshop or Coffee Tavern to pay top-penny for what's not worth having when you've had it,' Sophie said.

Sitting looking out to sea after they had eaten, and Susan murmuring: 'Grand place this would be to bring the children for a week from Merthyr.' After a bit Megan said: 'Over there somewhere is where they are in America.' 'No doubt,' said Susan. 'There's a ship now.' 'Yes,' said Megan, 'a big ship – and there's another. First time for me to see a ship.' 'First time for me too,' said Susan. They sat looking at the ships. 'It's funny,' said Megan, after a long silence. 'What?' 'How I didn't like you much at first.' 'Oh.' 'When our Will started courting you, I mean.' 'Oh.' Then after a bit Susan said: 'Neither did I care much for you then.' 'Half-soaked I thought you then.' 'P'raps I am a bit half-soaked,' said Susan.

'Then there's our Moriah,' said Megan after a bit. 'It isn't that I don't like her – I don't know what it is, gel. We no sooner meet than – I'm not saying that it's all her fault. P'raps I'm gone a bit funny too.'

'P'raps.'

'Not enough to do, p'raps that's what it is. Sophie won't let me soil my hands, so after I've gathered the bit o' rent on Monday I've nothing to do but sit like a dummy all the week. Then p'raps I gets nasty.'

'P'raps. Why don't you take to singing in the choir again, in Dan bach's choir that's winning everywhere?'

'P'raps I will. Isn't it time to go to look for the train?'

On the train they were seated facing each other not speaking all the way to Merthyr. Then no sooner than they got out of the station on to the main road, Megan said: 'Yes, I think I will take to do a bit of singing with the choir again,' said it as though it were knitting or something she was going to take to do again.

The next two outings were to places they could all go to on their own two legs. To the sports in the Penydarren

go up on the bus,' she said, taking Peg Delaney's other arm.

'Put these two tickets somewhere safe,' she said to Sophie when she reached the house. 'Peg, you rest on the couch a bit. Dan, you go an' see how that garden in the back is looking. Everything coming on grand. . . .'

'Tickets for what are these then?' said Sophie as Dan went out to see the garden and smoke his pipe.

'For me an' you to go to Swansea to hear that Madame Patti sing. Put 'em safe in that drawer with the rent-books an' things.'

'For us to go on the old train do you mean?' said Sophie, who had never been on the train.

'Of course, for we can't walk to Swansea.'

'Then I'm not going,' said Sophie.

Megan tried hard many times during the weeks that followed, but Sophie said: 'No, I tell you again. Never have I been on the old train, an' I'm too old to start going with it now. Take Susan, I'll look to the baby an' the house for her to go.'

Susan, now that she had had taste of going about, for she enjoyed herself grand that night in Cardiff when Moriah was singing there, was glad of the chance to go with Megan to hear Madame Patti, who was singing in Swansea in the afternoon, not in the night. Before twelve o'clock, before the children came home from school to their dinners, they had to leave Merthyr to get to Swansea in time for the concert in the Albert Hall there.

Between everything that day cost Megan over a sovereign, for she paid for everything. But it was worth it, she thought, if only for the memory of Madame Patti singing 'Home Sweet Home', which to Megan was worth all the foreign songs Madame Patti and the singers she had with her sang.

After the concert she and Susan went to sit on the sands in the sun whilst they ate the food they had brought with them, and drank the bottle o' pop bought off one of the standings stood where you cross the railway crossing to go

down to the sands. Sophie had made them take food in paper. 'Then you won't have to go to any old cookshop or Coffee Tavern to pay top-penny for what's not worth having when you've had it,' Sophie said.

Sitting looking out to sea after they had eaten, and Susan murmuring: 'Grand place this would be to bring the children for a week from Merthyr.' After a bit Megan said: 'Over there somewhere is where they are in America.' 'No doubt,' said Susan. 'There's a ship now.' 'Yes,' said Megan, 'a big ship – and there's another. First time for me to see a ship.' 'First time for me too,' said Susan. They sat looking at the ships. 'It's funny,' said Megan, after a long silence. 'What?' 'How I didn't like you much at first.' 'Oh.' 'When our Will started courting you, I mean.' 'Oh.' Then after a bit Susan said: 'Neither did I care much for you then.' 'Half-soaked I thought you then.' 'P'raps I am a bit half-soaked,' said Susan.

'Then there's our Moriah,' said Megan after a bit. 'It isn't that I don't like her – I don't know what it is, gel. We no sooner meet than – I'm not saying that it's all her fault. P'raps I'm gone a bit funny too.'

'P'raps.'

'Not enough to do, p'raps that's what it is. Sophie won't let me soil my hands, so after I've gathered the bit o' rent on Monday I've nothing to do but sit like a dummy all the week. Then p'raps I gets nasty.'

'P'raps. Why don't you take to singing in the choir again, in Dan bach's choir that's winning everywhere?'

'P'raps I will. Isn't it time to go to look for the train?'

On the train they were seated facing each other not speaking all the way to Merthyr. Then no sooner than they got out of the station on to the main road, Megan said: 'Yes, I think I will take to do a bit of singing with the choir again,' said it as though it were knitting or something she was going to take to do again.

The next two outings were to places they could all go to on their own two legs. To the sports in the Penydarren

Park all one day, then to the same place one evening later to hear the Black Watch band play, and to watch the fireworks after the band had finished playing. Megan she went with Dan bach's choir to compete in the Abergavenny chief choral, and the choir it won the hundred-pound prize.

It was getting on for Christmas when – on a Friday afternoon it was – Will's boys instead of going straight home from school, came up to Megan's the four of 'em.

'Well, what do you lot want now again?' said Sophie as they walked in without knocking or anything.

'We want to talk to bopa Megan, not you,' said the eldest as cheeky as anything.

'Talk you,' said Megan. 'Have you been home to tea?'

'No, we came straight here to settle this matter.'

'Put tea for 'em, Sophie. What matter are you talking about?' she asked the boy.

'This in the Drill Hall,' he said, smoothing a small handbill flat on the table. 'A man was by the school-gate giving these out. It's for the children's performance middle-day to-morrow.'

'Children's performance of what?' said Sophie, spreading the tablecloth.

'Our Owen was talking to bopa Megan, not to you,' said little Shon.

'Don't be cheeky, Shon,' said Megan. 'What is it, Owen?'

'Listen.' He began to read. 'Poole's World Diorama and War in Egypt and the Soudan. After a long season at Cardiff – '

'I thought you said the Drill Hall, Merthyr,' said Sophie, cutting food for them.

'Course I said the Drill Hall, an' if you opened – '

'Owen!'

'Right, bopa Megan, but she's always – Here, read it yourself. It's only tuppence to-morrow middle-day for them who shows one o' them bills by the door, an' I got a bill for you to come for tuppence with us.'

'An' pay the tuppences for you lot same time,' said Sophie.

'Tell her to shut up like you tells us, bopa Megan,' said little Shon.

'Shut up, you. Is it there to-night?' she asked Owen.

'It's been there all the week. But sixpence the lowest in the night.'

'What time do it start in the nights?'

'I know,' said little Shon, 'for I was over by the Drill Hall last night when the Cyfarthfa hooter blew seven, an' then the doors opened for people to go in.'

'All right. After you've finished your teas, off you go down to tell your mother to get ready to come with us all.'

'Her as well?' said little Shon, pointing at Sophie.

'Yes, but not you if you don't stop your cheek,' Megan told him.

'Stop your old cheek, our Shon,' his three brothers now cried. They found old Sophie a bit sharp, but she was in her way as good to them as Megan was. 'Come on,' said Owen, rising from the table with a round of bread and butter in one hand, his cap in the other, 'let's go tell our mam to get ready.'

It was grand in the Drill Hall, where they allowed children in arms to be carried by their mothers into the Diorama. The man with a long stick pointing as the scene it went round told about all the places and the fighting, and after that there was a troupe of performing dogs, and after them there was more than you could get anywhere else for sixpence. 'Pity now that Will didn't come, for he would have liked that, I'm sure,' Susan said as they were on the way home from the Drill Hall.

Joe down Cardiff had made up his mind to risk it, anyway. Dai Daniel his partner could stay stuck in the mud if he liked, but Joe he would take the risk. He had tried hard to make his partner see the possibilities of the docks, down where men with their heads stuck on the right way

were making more in a week than the firm of Daniel and Davies made in a year. ‘The merchant princes’ were the men Joe was all the time thinking about and talking about. Many a morning he had posted himself where he could watch them coming into the main street from where they lived in Park Place, Charles Street, and in the vicinity of St. Andrew’s Church. In frock coats and with box-hats on their heads they marched towards the station to board their train for the docks. Those are the men who are making the money, thought Joe, those are the men who are going to make Cardiff a far greater port than Liverpool or any other port. Several times he had followed them down to the docks’ offices, where, so he thought, all they had to do was wait for the money to roll in.

Coal and iron, that’s the stuff to handle, not furniture and household effects. ‘Favoured with instructions,’ and ‘Lot 1 –’ Joe was tired of that business. In that case, said his partner, no doubt he could find a buyer for Joe’s interest in the business. ‘Well, find him,’ Joe said, knowing that for long Dai Daniel’s brother-in-law had been wanting to come from Merthyr to try his luck in Cardiff.

Having said that Joe walked out of the office, leaving Dai Daniel to carry on as best he could. He, Joe, had finished. Down the docks he went for another look around, and over a cup of coffee with a freelance broker he talked, and the other man he talked, of the change-over from iron to steel that was taking place. ‘That’s going to mean a lot o’ money for somebody,’ said the man. Joe left him to look around the little houses on the outskirts of the quarter which was made up of offices. Several little places in which to open an office he made a note of before going back to an hotel in town for lunch. After lunch he sat in the smoke-room with a drink before him, smoking a cigar, and calculating how much he would have on hand to start on his new career down the docks. About a thousand pounds, he thought – that’s if his partner’s brother-in-law would pay the price Joe intended asking. Then there was

always Megan. . . . But he hoped it would not be necessary for him to trouble her.

He finished his drink and left the hotel. With his head in the clouds he walked the streets of the town someone had called 'the coalopolis of Wales'. He pictured himself in an office down the docks, seated at his desk when a clerk would notify him of the arrival from the hills of so many thousand tons of coal, or so many thousand tons of steel rails now, and he would give instructions for the passing of it on to ships he would have waiting in the East and West Bute Docks. After a day of 'passing it on' he would return to his mansion in Charles Street — though Park Place was more to his taste. One of those high four-storied places, with stabling and coach-house at the back.

Ships he would always have waiting in the Roath Basin and in the docks, waiting for cargoes of black diamonds from the hills. Ships bound east for Cardiff walloping their way across many seas to get a load of what was all the time flowing down from the hills. 'I know the hills, know where it all comes from,' said Joe to himself. 'Most of those making money down the docks know only Cardiff, where they sit with the letters F.O.B. for their guidance. Brokers, shipping agents, exporters and importers, ship-owners and coalowners, and the owners of works now being reconstructed for steel-making, what do they know of the hills from where their wealth comes? What can they, being English, the majority of them, know of the hills. But I know, for I've lived there, and worked down a pit before I was eight years old. Yes, I know.'

'Our export trade,' those docksmen were continually talking about. Increasing rapidly, now millions of tons annually being exported. So much per ton F.O.B. The magic head-letters between producer and consumer, the letters profit-dripping. The letters F.O.B. between a world demand and inexhaustible supplies. So get fixed at the docks between producer and consumer and fight for your share of the easy pickings. So I will, said Joe.

Young he was and fit to fight for his share of the pickings, the easy pickings. Three years before he would be thirty, and in those three years he would lay the foundation on which, during the next ten years he would — yes, he would be one of the merchant princes of Cardiff.

He came to earth as he was passing the Public Hall, which he was surprised to find was open at that time in the day. As he went forward to read the printed bill he suddenly remembered. Of course, at three o'clock this afternoon. His watch said half-past three. Too late. 'Many in?' he said to the attendant who had come out to look anxiously right and left. 'About a dozen,' replied the disgusted attendant, adding: 'An' if he don't soon come they'll have gone.' 'What, hasn't it started?' said Joe. The man looked at him and sighed. 'How can it start when he ain't come to start it?'

Joe thought for a minute before deciding to go in. He read the printed bill again: 'Mr. Oscar Wilde, who will lecture on Beauty, Taste, and Ugliness in Dress.' Should be interesting. Anyway, he was tired after so much walking. Hadn't he read that this was the man who when landing in America had said that the Atlantic had not pleased him. 'In the event of his not coming, I suppose we shall have our money returned,' he said to the man. 'You'd better ask him in the pay-box.' The man in the pay-box assured Joe that Mr. Wilde was on his way to the Public Hall. So Joe paid the price of admission and went into the Hall. His footsteps rang hollow in the almost empty hall, and the few people scattered about inside turned their heads hopefully. But when Joe sat down to turn the collar of his overcoat up about his ears they looked to the front again, and fixed their eyes once more on the table on which stood a water-vessel flanked by a couple of glasses. Two chairs, one behind the table, one to the right of it. Palms in pots looking ghostly right and left of the platform.

In the silence expectant Joe counted. The man at the

door had lied, but not grossly. Instead of the dozen he had said were inside there were nearly four dozen people – forty-four to be correct. The silence was broken only by sighs and coughs for the next quarter of an hour or so, after which footsteps were heard. At last. A young man clean-shaven, smiled faintly as he seemed to float from the side of the platform to the chair right of the table. Another man took the chair behind the table, and someone in the Hall clapped his or her hands – but only once, for the clap it sounded so hollow, as hollow as a clap sounded to summon back to Hades those of the damned on leave till midnight. The young man seated right of the table up on the platform shivered at the sound of the clap – or with cold – then he shaded his eyes with his hand to try and discover his audience.

Oscar Wilde was thirty years old this October, and Joe felt sorry for him up there on the stage, from which he was now being called upon to address himself to what must have appeared to him an empty and deserted continent. His appearance up there on the stage in the light which was neither the light of day or of night, was most striking. He might have been a fallen angel who was working his way back to Heaven by reforming the world, starting with dress reform, and from there working inwards to the very soul of the world. His voice fell sadly musical into the void. ‘To dress well one must have a sense of colour. . . .’ Joe nodded his approval. ‘Dress should dignify the human figure. . . .’ Romantic was the word Joe had been angling in his mind for, and now, having hooked it, he looked at its embodiment, he thought. The hair, he must remember the hair. Speaking now of Egypt, Greece, and Italy: ‘We should give every child an artistic training, and then – ’ Joe smiled wryly as he recalled his own childhood down the pit – ‘The waist, a delicate curve – ’ Joe nodded his approval, for Joe was thinking more than a little of waists about this time. ‘The real enemy, the destroyer of beauty and taste in dress, is what is called “fashion” – ’

Joe didn't quite agree. 'Coming to the feet. There are those who think the beauty of the foot consists in its smallness. No, feet should be in proportion to the whole figure.' Joe looked down at his feet.

The lecturer concluded with the hope that he had succeeded in interesting his audience in a subject far more important than the coarse-minded would have them believe it was. Joe clapped his hands hot in appreciation, not so much of what the lecturer had said, but of his having succeeded in speaking for so long in face of about half an acre of empty seats. To have spoken for about forty minutes to such an audience, in such an atmosphere, and in such a ghastly light, was, Joe thought, a performance worthy of the greatest appreciation. When the man seated behind the table rose to announce that 'Mr. Wilde will be lecturing here this evening again', Joe vowed that he would make one of those present. The attendance at the evening lecture was no better than at the afternoon lecture, so Joe concluded that Cardiff was not interested in the sartorial side of aesthetics. The evening lecture being more or less that delivered in the afternoon, Joe was able to concentrate on the lecturer's appearance. He sat fingering his by now heavy moustache, with his eyes fixed on the lecturer's *fin de siècle* clean-shaven face. Yes, he thought, a man certainly looked more romantic that way. He would have his moustache removed the very next day, he decided. Go into the barber and say: 'Off with this, please.' And the barber would no doubt say: 'Off, did you say, sir?' 'Yes, off was what I most distinctly said,' Joe would say. The barber, wearing, like all barbers in town, a moustache long and lovely, would sigh as, reaching for his scissors to cut off a moustache in its prime after ten years growing, ten years from the first sprouting little hair to its present luxuriance. Never had cold steel been allowed to threaten it. Having reared it, so to speak, having reared it and cared for it, here was a young man — must be going out of his mind, walking into my place, said the barber to his friend, and demanding

that I should as good as commit murder. There, it's off, thought Joe. I start my new career as docksman with a new face. But wait a minute. How would such a face be received down the docks by the other long moustached and bearded docksmen? That was the question. During his months of study of docksmen's appearance he had never, no, never seen one with a face like Oscar Wilde's. Those who had a clean-shaven upper lip atoned for it with side-whiskers mutton-chop design or eastern curtain pattern. No, on second thoughts, such a face would not do for the docks. Better keep my moustache, and if I want to try any alteration, then I can wax it the French way, or curl its ends, or let them droop till the ends will be level with the tuft under the lower lip some men are sporting, or — well, there are all sorts of experiments a man can make with a moustache like mine, but once it's off a man's practically naked. Naked? He looked hard at the lecturer without listening to what he was saying. Naked? Yes, that is what he would look like, and feel like, without his moustache. Naked. Positively.

Megan had every available member of her family around her table for Christmas dinner. Shon was there, but not Moriah, who was still in America, singing opera now that her concert tour was ended. In her last letter she said that she expected to be home about the middle of the year following. 'Home, indeed,' said Megan as she put the letter away in the drawer with the other letters, the drawer in which she kept letters, rent-books and bank-books under lock and key. 'Home, indeed. She's never home when she is this side the water. Anyway, let's hope that she'll have a good Christmas out there. If she had any sense she'd go to them in Scranton for Christmas.'

After dinner was over, and the washing up as well, Susan asked Megan if she was coming down to the Row for a bit, same as she did last Christmas.

'No, why should she?' said Joe, who was smoking one

of Shon's cigars. 'Megan's finished with the Row, I hope.'

'Then you hopes wrong, Joe bach,' said Megan. 'Come on, Susan.'

'Don't forget what you said about going up to see Dan and Peg Delaney before writing back to Norah,' said Sophie, on her way upstairs to lie on the bed a bit.

'I won't forget. Come on, you boys - or would you rather stay here to play them games your Uncle Joe brought?'

'Leave 'em here,' said Will, stretching himself along the couch.

'To listen to you snoring?' said Susan.

'I'm not going to sleep,' said Will. 'Go you if you're going. Haven't you got enough in your arms without wanting these four dragging at you?'

'Yes, plenty,' said Megan. 'Come on, Susan.'

The baby in the shawl with Susan was a bit of a load, for he was the heaviest of all her babies, an' his teeth was at him awful. Then he wanted his feet, for he was fourteen months old the third of next month. But being as he was so heavy Susan was afraid for him to walk for fear of his legs going gammy under him. Then she would have him in leg-irons like many another about the place who had been left to walk too early. Little Shon had been walking long before he was this baby's age, but Shon was not near so heavy on his feet as this baby was. So Susan was still carrying him in the shawl, and Susan she had another baby coming as well. 'Let me carry him a bit', said Megan. 'Have him you,' said Susan.

So Megan with the heavy baby in the shawl, and Susan at her side now empty-handed, they went first up to Penydarren to see Norah's parents, as Norah in America asked in her letter. All the public-houses on the way up were heaving, for there was only a few minutes to go before the first of Christmas Day's two short drinking sessions would be legally ended. The landlords of the public-houses with

their wives and relations helping were being rushed off their feet. Sticky with beer up to their elbows they all were, and the outsides of the quarts and pints and tots were all sticky with beer, for there was no chance to do any washing-up of the beer-vessels. The money was all sticky with beer, and the landlords said to their wives and the others allowed to give change: 'Be careful not to give two for one stuck together,' the beer on the money drying like glue. The two short sessions on Christmas Day were enough to kill landlords and their wives and helpers, for it was like having to sprint twice for a couple of hours, and two-hour sprints are very exhausting. To-morrow, Boxing Day, there would be a chance for the landlords and their wives and helpers to breathe now and then. Seventeen hours continuous drinking-time to-morrow, thank goodness, said the landlords. No having to push men out before they had as much as quenched their thirst properly. But to-morrow, long before night, them buckets of droppings under the beer-taps will be sold as best beer, at the least as half-an'-half. Yes, Christmas Day with its restrictions was very hard on the landlords, their wives and helpers.

'The old drink,' muttered Megan, as men came out backwards and most reluctantly from the public-houses. 'Few of them have had their Christmas dinner yet.'

'They've had their Christmas beer though,' said Susan in her half-soaked way. They found Dan and Peg Delaney in their little house like Darby and Joan, with a few of the children from next door, where they were drinking and singing, in with them out o' the way. 'They're at it again next door,' said Megan, looking at the children from next door now in with Dan without a shoe to their foot in this weather. Dan as sober as a judge, a man who had never been known to drink, smiled tolerantly into Megan's eyes filled with sad anger. Peg wanted to show her the photo of Norah's eldest gel taken in Philadelphia. 'The living image of our Llew' she is,' thought Megan. 'I think

it's Norah she's most like,' said Peg. Susan when asked her opinion said that about the eyes the gel on the photo was more like Llew' than Norah, but about the mouth she was more like Norah than Llew'. 'An' it's your Moriah's nose she've got,' Susan said to conclude. 'I'm having it framed,' said Norah's mother. 'So would I have mine framed had they sent me one,' said Megan. 'You'll have one, never fear,' said Peg, and she was right, for Megan had it before the week was out. Dan Delaney, with the youngest of the children from next door on his knee, was saying how bad things had been in the works 'for us old fellers' since the works had gone off iron on to steel. "Tis not any more iron they're making from below in Cyfarthfa to Blaenavon over the top. 'Tis steel all the works are making.'

'No doubt,' said Megan. 'We're off down to see the people in the Row. When are you two coming down to see me again?'

Some day soon, they said. Mind it is soon, said Megan. Off down the Row she and Susan went, Susan carrying the baby downhill past public-houses all closed now. It was nearly dark before they had what Megan called 'rounded' the Row. No wonder it was nearly dark, for in every house - She would start at the top house, into which she walked saying, 'Hullo.' 'Hullo, gel, sit down a minute.' 'Well, for a minute then.' But it would be nearer a quarter of an hour than a minute before she rose to leave to go 'an' see how they are next door'. Then she always spent an extra minute or two in the little house in which she had lived for so long before going to live in what the people of the Row called 'the big house'.

There were one or two women in the Row who still owed her a bit o' money, and each time she visited them they would say: 'I haven't forgot the bit I owe you, Megan fach.' 'If you haven't I have.' 'But you shall have it, for I could never rest owing people money. If it wasn't for James breaking his leg that time...' The women of the Row not able to read or write felt a debt unpaid like something

eating its way through their brain. Megan, being of the Row, which in turn was of the Rows, the poor and proud Rows in which lived the poor and proud people, the poor and proud people whose proudest boast it was that 'I don't owe a ha'penny to anybody, thank God.' To be able to say that many of the poor and proud people of the Rows had gone hungry many's the time. Their men might 'strap' beer in the public-houses, but the women, the poor and proud women of the Rows would manage somehow without going into debt on what the men handed them after paying their 'scores' at the public-houses. The day before the pay-Saturday was more often than not a foodless day for the poor and proud women of the Rows, but they endured it to be able to say, 'I don't owe a ha'penny to anybody, thank God.' Megan knew all about this spirit, and knew that it was no use her telling those who still owed her a little to forget it, for they couldn't forget it. Neither was it any use her saying: 'Don't bother about the old money, for I've got plenty.' Had she half the money of the world they would make her take what they owed her as soon as they could manage it. Foolish pride, some said it was, this 'I don't owe anybody a ha'penny, thank God,' talk. And perhaps . . .

If Megan missed one week's visitation to the Row, the next time she went it would be: 'Where was you last week, gel?' It was Megan was the poorer for missing a week. For there were those in the Row who remembered ever so much that Megan wanted never to forget. Old Maria Rowlands in the top house but one could well remember the day when Megan's mother now gone was married. 'I was standing there on my doorstep when your father who had had a drop – but not too much up to then that day – picked up your mother in his arms like if she was a baby before coming to the bridge, picked her up to carry her over the bridge and over the doorstep. Your mother, God help her, was lovely; an' your father a fine-looking man too. I can tell you what your mother, God help her, was wearing

that day — But there, you're going to see the others in the Row.'

'Yes, but there's plenty time, Maria. Tell me, tell me what our mam had on that day.'

Maria would tell her again, and again and again, new every time it was to Megan. 'And when is your man going to carry you over the doorstep, Megan fach?' the old woman would sometimes ask. Then Megan would mumble that it was time for her to 'go an' see them next door'. Down through the Row, and often around the corner to some of the houses along the Tramroad as well, Megan went once most weeks, and as she went the never-ending tale of birth and life and death she was told. Each natural event of the week the neighbours so glad to see her in the Row made a peg of to hang their tales of long ago. Births, marriages and deaths in the summer, in the pelting rain, in the snow, they recalled. Funerals 'rising' in the Row they recalled, by 'rising' they meant the gathering outside the house in readiness to receive the coffined body to sing it away to the Cefn. Strikes they remembered only too well by the time they had finished paying the back-rent. Big meetings and singing festivals in the chapels they remembered — what didn't they remember? Megan heard it all time and again, and still she wanted more. So every week to the Row she went for more.

'I expect them boys have about driven Will off his head by this time,' said Susan to Megan as they left the Row to go back to have tea again at Megan's.

'No fear,' said Megan.

Neither had they, for most of the afternoon they spent playing the new game with Uncle Joe, who had brought the new game from Cardiff for them. Their father had soon gone to sleep on the couch, and their Uncle Shon dropped off in the arm-chair. Their Uncle Joe stopped shaking the dice in the little cup when their father snored, to point first at their father, and then at their Uncle Shon asleep in the arm-chair. 'That's the worst thing a man can do,' he said

to the boys. ‘If you boys want to get on in the world, then never sleep in the daytime.’

‘Not when we’ll be working nights same as our dad was once?’ said Owen.

‘That’s different,’ said his Uncle Joe, throwing the dice. ‘Edwin sleeps in the daytime,’ said little Shon.

‘Who’s Edwin?’ said his Uncle Joe.

‘Our baby,’ said little Shon.

‘I’m not talking about babies,’ said his Uncle Joe. ‘What are you going to do now?’

‘Make our dad jump,’ said little Shon, his mouth close to the ear of his sleeping father. ‘Produce – your – cork,’ he shouted. His father jumped up to fumble in his pockets, until he realised that it was only little Shon at his tricks and not a fellow-member of the hauliers’ cork club. ‘I’ve a mind to give you a clip,’ he said to little Shon, who was laughing. Shon, who was sleeping in the arm-chair, opened his eyes to see what the row was about. ‘I must have dropped off,’ he said.

‘Worst thing a man can do,’ said little Shon.

‘What?’ said Shon, his uncle.

‘Sleep in the daytime unless you’re working nights, or you’re a baby like our Edwin – here’s our mam an’ bopa Megan.’

‘Then now for a cup o’ tea,’ said his father.

CHAPTER XVII

'A THOUSAND POUNDS!'

A THOUSAND pounds!' gasped Megan, stiffening in the arm-chair. Joe, who had travelled from Cardiff to Merthyr with the rodneys' train to rouse Megan shortly after midnight with his knocking, nodded his head. 'That's the amount I'm short of to buy a third share in a steamship two young fellows I know have an option on. And I must have it to go back with to-morrow morning.'

'A ship?'

Joe sighed. 'Yes, a ship. You know what a ship is, don't you?'

'Yes; but where are you going to get all that money from?'

'From you, I hope,' said Joe quietly.

'From me? How much money do you think I've got then?'

'I could tell you. I don't suppose you've touched a penny of the money the old woman Ellis left you. You'll get it back all right – if that's what you're worrying about. You got the four hundred you let me have back, didn't you?'

'Yes, sprat to cetch a mac'rel, p'raps,' said Megan, not thinking.

Joe flushed up, stood up, and began to look around. 'Where's my hat?' he said, boiling over.

'On your head – But sit down, Joe bach, for I didn't mean that; slipped out it did without me thinking. It's the way I do talk in my dullness.' Joe sat down again. 'But a thousand pounds is a lot of money, Joe bach. What are

you an' them other two men going to do with that ship if you buy it?"

He had to laugh in her face. "You've seen people carrying coal about here, haven't you? Well, that ship of ours will carry coal to all parts of the world for me and my partners. Megan, if only you could understand what this means to me. It's the chance of a lifetime. In less than a year I'll be in a position to pay you back with interest."

"You and your old interest. If I get it back I'll get what I give, no more. An' if I don't get it back at all I won't have to go to the Workhouse."

He jumped up to kiss her. "The ship we'll call *The Megan* after you, and it shall be the first ship of what will soon be "The Megan Steamship Company". For -'

"Wait till you have one ship before talking bigger. P'raps somebody will buy before you - Now, none of that old softness. I'll go down to the bank with you in the morning to sign my hand. For I don't think you are one to do wrong with money, Joe bach. I must go up to get a bed from under mine or Sophie's for you to lie on. We puts them one on top of the other when there's nobody to sleep on them - make you a cup o' tea first."

Sophie had already made a bed up for Joe whilst he and Megan had been talking business downstairs.

On the following Saturday evening Joe was up again to inform Megan that he was now a partner of the steamship company the thousand pounds he had had from her had helped to form. Shon had driven up from Bridgend to stay the week-end in the Castle Hotel, Joe staying with Megan. On the Sunday afternoon he tried to make Megan miss her Sunday-school to go with him for a drive as far as The Storey Arms in the Breconshire Beacons. Grand up there, he said it was. "No doubt," said Megan. "Go you an' Joe, and come back here to tea." "My pony's not an express train," said Shon. "But I'll be back for tea. Come on, Joe."

About five o'clock it was they walked up from the Castle Hotel, where they left the pony to be attended to. A grand drive they said they had had. 'No doubt,' said Megan. 'When was you in chapel last, Shon?' 'Let me see —' 'Never mind seeing, you'll come to Zoar with me to-night.' 'Funny thing,' said Shon. 'What?' 'You'll never come for a drive with me, but you'll take me to chapel.' 'Chapel's different,' said Megan. 'How often do you go to chapel in Cardiff, Joe?' 'Occasionally, at least once a month.' 'Well, well, well, well — did you hear that, Sophie? Once a month, he said; an' Shon can't remember when he was in chapel last. That's the way some people do go when they are away from their own place. Leaves their Sunday-school an' chapel go. So you'd better come with me to Zoar to-night, the two of you, for it may be your last chance of hearing John Thomas preach. He's going away, more's the pity, to preach English for some English chapel over in Pontypool. They, in their underhanded way, have no doubt persuaded him to leave us to go to them. One of the grandest preachers Zoar ever had.' She sighed. 'An' to think that he's going to preach English for the English.'

Joe couldn't help laughing at her. 'To hear you talk,' he said, 'one who didn't know otherwise would think that the English Nonconformist chapels in Wales are not entitled to have good preachers.'

'You talk like that because you're gone three-parts English yourself since you're down Cardiff,' she said.

'Anyway, it's silly to talk about those of the English chapels being underhanded. The English chapels here, High Street, Market Square, the English Wesleyans in Pont-morlais —'

'I didn't say they was underhanded. I said the chapel over Pontypool that are taking John Thomas from us to preach English — isn't there plenty who can only preach English without them taking a man like John Thomas who can preach ten times better in Welsh than English? He's

our preacher, have been, he have, for five years now. The young people of Zoar —'

'That's where we'd better be going if we are going,' said Sophie.

'I'll be ready in one minute,' said Megan. 'But it nearly breaks my heart to think of John Thomas going from Zoar to preach English. Give me the little envelope, Sophie.' She put the four shillings, the weekly rent of one of her houses, into the little envelope Sophie handed her. 'Zoar shall have that every week from me no matter who's preaching there,' she said. 'Don't forget the chapel, then God won't forget you, Joe bach. If ever you get on, remember that. Come on then.'

John Thomas preached magnificently in Welsh that evening, preached in a way as made Joe inclined to agree with Megan about it being a pity such a great preacher in Welsh was soon going elsewhere to preach in English. He moved not only Joe, but all present in Zoar that evening, for his sermon was the prelude to farewell to Zoar. Like a meek lion looking the nobler for his meekness, Joe thought he looked down there in the pulpit. From the pulpit his words came appealingly, and his appeal was for a more loving understanding between the Welsh and English, here in Merthyr, and between the peoples of the world. Each word came more powerful than the last in its appeal. Then there were times when, like the Psalmist he let the words take possession of him, allowed them to carry him away to the Mount, from where he would again return to the pulpit of Zoar with wonder-filled eyes. It was something more than just a service to those present, it was an almost unique spiritual experience. The eyes of Shon Howell, the Cheap Jack, were full of mixed regrets and the beginning of hope as he sat listening to John Thomas. All the good stories he had heard from jolly commercials and others in the many hotels he had stayed at, one by one turned sour within his brain. Joe, so determined to get on down Cardiff, so determined to become what he called

'one of the merchant princes of Cardiff'. The man in the pulpit was greater than the greatest of the so-called merchant princes of any town, city or country. 'Friends,' he was in the Welsh tongue whispering down there in the pulpit, and the people crowding the chapel hung on that wonderful word to await the next from his lips. 'Friends . . .'

'Well?' said Megan quietly as they walked home after the service.

'I'm very glad I came with you this evening,' said Joe. 'So am I,' said Shon. Sophie she didn't say anything.

Will and the four boys they didn't say anything either. Susan she wasn't there at all, for she was nearly on the point of going to bed again, and it wasn't safe for her to go anywhere very far from the house. Megan sent Shon and Joe up to the house with Sophie, whilst she went across to the Row with Will and the boys to see how Susan was.

'I'm all right,' laughed Susan. 'I shall be worse before I'm better,' she added in her half-soaked way.

'Better have Sophie down early in the morning to send Will to work, and the boys to school after,' suggested Megan.

'No, not to-morrow morning; I'll say when I want her down.'

Being as Susan was so near her time Megan called there every night before going to bed. Tuesday night she called on the way home from choir-practice, when to her surprise, there was Will's eldest boy, Owen, as proud as Punch with a new, long-legged duck-cloth pit-trousers on. The other boys stood around looking enviously at their brother, and their father was saying to Owen: 'There, you're a man now.'

'Man, indeed,' cried Megan. 'You don't mean to say that you're taking that boy to work underground?'

'Where else?' said Will. 'He's twelve years old, ain't he?'

‘What if he is? I tell you that you shan’t take him to work underground.’

‘Mind your own business, Megan,’ said Susan heavily. ‘All right, take the trousers off now, Owen. Up to bed all of you.’

With difficulty the mother, so heavy with child, followed the boys up to hear ‘em say their prayers. Downstairs Will was saying to Megan: ‘Why don’t you sit a minute?’

‘No, I won’t sit. She needn’t have been so sharp.’

‘Take no notice of Susan, gel. But what have you got against the boy going to work down the pit?’

‘What, indeed. Didn’t the old pit take dad, and your brothers Sam and Owen – the one the boy’s named after. Isn’t that enough for our family to give to the old pit? If it’s the money he’ll earn you’re thinking of, then that shan’t stand in the boy’s way. For I’ll make up the difference between what he’d earn down the pit, and what he’d get behind the counter of a shop.’

‘Shop?’ said Will scornfully.

‘Yes, I’ll find place for him behind the counter of the shop I deals at – if they won’t find place for him I’ll take my order elsewhere. Clean work in a shop, tidy work at which men an’ boys don’t get killed or drowned.’

‘What’s this talk about killed and drowned?’ said Susan as she came downstairs.

‘Megan wants us to let her find place for our Owen behind the counter of a shop,’ said Will.

‘Yes,’ said Megan, ‘tidy an’ clean behind the counter of a shop.’

‘He wouldn’t go to stand behind the counter of a shop if you crowned him,’ said Susan.

‘How do you know when you haven’t asked him?’ said Megan.

‘You shall ask him yourself.’ Susan called up the stairs. ‘Owen, come down to mam a minute, there’s a good boy.’ Down the boy came in his shirt. ‘Listen to your bopa Megan a minute,’ his mother said.

Taking him by the shoulders Megan said: 'Owen, how would you like bopa to find place for you behind the counter of some shop where you'll be clean an' safe?' The boy snapped his mouth shut and shook his head. 'No, do you mean?' Again the boy shook his head.

'Speak, boy,' said his mother. 'And remember, if you rather behind the counter of a shop than work underground, mam is willing, an' so's your father. Speak now.'

'Underground with dad I want to work,' said the boy firmly.

'There you are,' said Will, looking at Megan, who cried:

'Yes, but what do he know? Have you ever told him what happened to your father an' brothers?'

'No, not I,' said Will.

'Then there you are too,' said Megan.

'You tell the boy now if you like,' said Susan.

'To be sure I'll tell him. Listen, Owen bach, listen now to bopa. When you was small, ay, an' before you was born . . .'

She told him of the explosions and the flood which had taken two of his uncles and his grandfather – 'and they were only three of many, Owen bach. . . .'

At the end of it all the boy said more firmly than before: 'Underground with dad I want to work.'

Will, as though proud of the boy, said again: 'There you are.'

'But why underground better than a shop?' cried Megan. 'Tell bopa why underground better than a shop?' she pressed.

The boy stood with only his short shirt on, his mouth shut fast. 'Speak, boy,' his mother said.

'I want to work underground till I'm a haulier with a horse like our dad drives,' he said with rushing words. 'I'd rather that than a shop any day. A horse and . . .' Megan listened to almost the same words as the boy's father had come running to her with in '68. 'Yes, yes, I heard

all that from your father years an' years ago,' she said as she turned away from the boy.

'Go back to your bed, Owen,' said his mother. 'Say good night to your bopa Megan,' she called as he was scampering up the stairs. 'Good night, bopa Megan,' the boy spoke down over his left shoulder. 'Good night,' said Megan flatly. 'What's the good of old money if they won't let you do anything for 'em?' she asked nobody in particular. 'You can't blame the boy,' said Will. 'He knows boys working in shops, an' he've seen them loaded like donkeys on their way up the Twyn an' other places - ay, an' I've seen 'em after stop-tap at night going with a donkey-load -'

'Leave it there now,' said Susan. 'What sort o' practice to-night, Megan?'

'Splendid. Dan bach told some o' them that haven't been coming to practice reg'lar pretty straight to-night. Come or stay away altogether, he told 'em. Next year he's taking us to try for the two-hundred-pound prize in Ponty-pool, where they're having a Golden Jubilee Eisteddfod.'

'H'm, two hundred pounds,' said Will.

'Old Maria top-house but one won't be long now,' said Susan.

'Sophie was saying,' said Megan.

'Maria's a good old age,' said Will. 'Must be, for same I remember her when I was a boy.'

'When did you hear from your Moriah last?' Susan asked Megan.

Megan thought for a minute: 'Have I had a letter since that one from London? - you know, the one in which she said that she had seen them in America when she was out there singing. I think Joe had a letter from her after that. I better go or Sophie - Will, you look after that boy you're taking to the pit in the morning.'

'He'll be all right, for he's going to start with one of the best colliers in the six-foot seam, a chap who lives in one o' them houses o' yours over on the British Tip. But if I

know our Owen he won't be working on the coal a minute after he's old enough to cetch a horse underground.'

'Shall Will come to "send" you a bit being as it's so late?' said Susan.

'No, I'll go myself. Sure you don't want Sophie down first thing in the morning to "send" Will to his work?'

Susan thought for a minute. 'P'raps she'd better - thank you for letting her. Before I went up them stairs to see the boys in bed I thought - But now I'm not so sure.'

'Then Sophie'll be down in time to send Will to work. Run up, Will, if it starts in the night. Good night now, then.'

Pitch-dark it was to cross the bridge to reach the main road where the gas-lamps stood stiff along the one side of the road about a hundred yards apart. She stood for a minute on the hard road to look back towards the Row, in two houses of which she could see a light. In Susan's, and in the top-house but one, where old Maria Rowlands was nearly gone, 'God help her,' murmured Megan. In Susan's there was one nearly coming, 'an' that's the way it is,' Megan added. The light went out in Susan's house. 'They've blown the lamp out before going to bed. Only light in old Maria's now. Ah, well.'

Stop-tap was turning men none too polite out of the public-houses, so Megan hurried home to Sophie, who said: 'Where can you say you've been till this time o' night?' 'Called at Susan's. Better you be there early in the morning to "send" our Will to his work, for if I'm not mistaken she'll be in bed bringing her baby.' 'All right, come to your supper,' said Sophie. 'I don't know,' said Megan. 'What don't you know?' said Sophie. 'That's what I can't tell you.' 'Botherin' nonsense you are for sure,' said Sophie. 'Eat your food. Did you hear how old Maria is down there?' 'Nearly gone, Susan said.' 'Why don't you eat food, gel?' 'I only want this cup o' tea.' 'Can't live on tea. Eat when I tell you. Botherin' your head

you are till you got no stomach for food. Take some pickled-cabbage to see if you can eat a bit after.'

Sophie made her eat a little before going to bed, where she lay awake half the night before she at last managed to sleep.

Megan was not the only one who couldn't sleep that night. Dan Delaney, he couldn't sleep either. But he had something to worry about, now that he in his old age was without work to go to any more. Being such a tidy man, one who had for long periods been a bit of a boss over gangs of Irish, he had been promised a job at one of the gates of the works, or at one of the level crossings. But there were hundreds of tidy old ironworkers to be considered for the half-dozen or so jobs the new steel era could toss like bones to such old men. 'Sorry, Dan,' the manager had said earlier that day. 'If I hear of anything . . .' For Dan was respected. Late in the hungry forties in a boat driven ashore on the coast of the Vale of Glamorgan, there was a strapping young Irishman and his young wife, who from the coast walked bare-footed at his side to Merthyr. Any gods'-amount of work the strapping young Irishman found waiting him in Sir Josiah John Guest's works at Dowlais. Nearly forty years Dan worked, and good money at times he earned, but how could he save when he gave all the time to them who after spending their money on drink came begging money to buy food? Dan, who didn't touch the drink was as tender-hearted as his wife, Peg, was. As long as they had a penny or a bit in the house they shared it, and the name of 'tidy people' was all the thanks they got from the people of Dowlais and Penydarren and Merthyr. Now without a day's work to go to, an' the pair of 'em nearer seventy than sixty – an' Dan not able to sleep for thinking about it.

From out the mouths of fiery bessemerers the hot light all the time came, the light by which those who could read could read the newspapers they bought, a mile away.

After the manager had earlier in the day told Dan that he was 'sorry', Dan like a ghost of the iron age, had wandered for a couple of hours through the steelworks that was an ironworks before going home to tell Peg what the manager had said. He hardly knew where he was in the old works made new for steel.

Expert blowers observing charged bessemerers – 'Tell that old man to get out o' the way.' What was blowing 'the charge' in the bessemer? Dan wondered, him no scholar in steel. Was it 'blowing' the impurities out of, and the dirtiness out of the boiling steel the men were? Was it with what they called 'compressed air' they blew the dirt out through the top o' the bessemer? an' was it dirt being blown out flaming that made the sky alight all the time? Dan wasn't sure. 'How are you, Dan?' cried a young man driving an engine by. 'Fine, Jimmy,' cried Dan, waving his hand after Tom Donovan's youngest boy, now driving the engine that pulled the iron trucks full of red-hot refuse from the blast-furnaces to be tipped fiery down the mountain red-hot to the left of Incline Top houses.

Fascinated, Dan stood to watch the charge from bessemerers being tipped into travelling ladles, from which it was tapped like thick fiery whisky into moulds, a half-ton in each, to be left in 'em to cool off. Then the stripping of the moulds he watched. He followed the steel ingots to the soaking-pits, where they were heated to be taken to the cogging-mill, from there to the rolling-mill – Dan getting mixed the more he asked men with little time to inform the likes o' him. The names confused him, though some were familiar coming unchanged from iron into steel. But others – Ballers, Bloomers, Shearers, Straighteners, Gaggers, Chippers, Filers, Measurers, Drillers – all the steel rail shaping. Steel sleepers, girders, fishplates, tin-bar....

Dan like an old fool standing where finished steel rails from the rail-bank now stacked waited for the inspectors to pass them for work the world over. Steel rails all lengths from thirty to sixty feet – Dan had heard that a rail a

hundred and twenty feet long had been rolled in the works over the mountain at Tredegar. But Dan wouldn't believe it. Now stood here near the rails which had passed through the hands of the many men with names for their work, many of them so strange to Dan. Hands and tongs and rolls. . . . Now they were here. Straight. No more warping now that the straighteners had finished with them. 'Well, Mr. Inspector?' 'Not bad.' The inspectors who, on behalf of their governments, on behalf of their railways, there to inspect the rails. The measurer there with them. A rail a little, just a little, that's all, too long. Less than a quarter of an inch too long – but didn't the band play. Rails just a teeny-weeny bit too long – see what it means? The merest fraction of an inch and the end of that rail has to be taken to have its end ground off to length, they told Dan – for they all knew Dan.

Dan with his head in a whirl left the works in which there was no place for the likes o' him to return to Peg, his wife, who was sat waiting in the little house side the road in Penydarren. Peg she didn't ask, for there was no need to. Had her Dan had the job minding the gate that the other old man whose son was a boss had got, then Dan would have told her. 'It's a fine place they've made of the works up there,' was what Dan said as he sat down to the bite of food Peg had ready for him. "'Tis no doubt a fine place,' said Peg, pouring herself a cup o' tea.

And Dan not able to sleep the night after seeing the wonders of the works that day fell to counting the times that the fiery mouths of the bessemer of Cyfarthfa and Dowlais opened to laugh illuminated belly-laughs up at the sky.

Owen, Will's boy, didn't sleep as well as he usually did. Several times during that same night he woke up thinking that it was surely time for him to get up out of bed to get dressed, and go with his father down the pit to see the wonders of it. He, too, when waking up before there was any need to, saw the bessemer lights coming red through the little upstairs window. And about the time he awoke

for the last time without calling, and so had to go back to sleep again, there were men rushing forward to go down a pit earlier than usual, a pit not far away it was.

For the manager had said that if the men wanted to finish early to attend the old man's funeral, then they would have to start earlier in the morning of the day of the funeral, that's all. For it was time all this old nonsense was stopped. Men stopping the pit to go home to walk behind corpses singing, when coal was wanted so bad as it was all over the world, was nothing more than nonsense. It had to stop. Let the dead bury their dead, so to speak.

But this old man had led the singing for years an' years ever since the chapel was first opened, and he was widely and deeply respected. No doubt, said the manager. He himself had thought the world of the old man now dead. But there was such a demand for coal, so – Anyway, the men agreed with the manager to start at three o'clock in the morning in order to finish at about one o'clock in the afternoon to attend the old man's funeral. So at three in the morning they all came as happy as could be, and down the pit-cage went with ten men per downward trip to return empty for ten men more. Singing as they went down, down, down some of them were, for a funeral after work is done for the day is not such a sad thing after all – for the old man to be buried had lived to such a good old age. They had left their wives with: 'Be sure to have water ready for me to wash all over by two o'clock at the latest,' and the wives were home looking to see if the sham-fronts and collars were clean for their men to wear at the funeral. And ten at a time the men were lowered down the pit in the pit-cage so early in the morning.

Ten more were in the pit-cage when the winding-engine-man he received the signal he was waiting for from the banksman, who was now with his lever ready to pull the rests the cage was resting on clear, immediately the cage was lifted off them by the winding-engineman pulling a lever

in the engine-house, the winding-engine-house, where from his post between the two huge drums the winding-engine-man could start the two cages moving, the one at the pit-bottom moving upwards, the one on the rests at the pit-head to move downwards as soon as the banksman had with his lever pulled the rest clear of the pit-cage's way. That huge drum on the left is this time lowering the cage, paying out the steel wire-rope coiled around itself in order to do so. The huge drum on the right is at the same time taking steel wire-rope into itself in order to bring up the other cage from the bottom of the pit. One down as the other comes up, up and down, down and up, and the winding-engine it goes puff-puff regular to the beat of the heart as it brings cages up as it sends cages down the livelong day. The winding-engine-house is, say, thirty yards from the hole of the pit. From the two huge drums in the winding-engine-house, the two steel wire-ropes rise to go up over the pit-head gear and into the grooved wheels which are the highest things above the framework over the pit's mouth. From those two grooved wheels high up, the steel wire-ropes go down to be attached to the couplings crowning the pit-cages, then everything is all of a piece, so to speak. Everything connected up, then the steam-song of the winding-engine, like a theme-song, can go on as the cages go up and then down. The song of the winding-engine has been likened by some to a muffled drinking-chorus, but really it is more like the distant panting of some huge animal in distress. But then it's too regular for panting, isn't it? For you could regulate your watch by — CRASH.

Not now you couldn't, for the steel wire-rope has snapped and from three points of an 'only Thou O God' triangle cries go up. The point of the triangle somewhere down the pit, from where God, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, and an earthly mother or two are being called upon to help — the cry is help, but no help can come — the triangle up-ended with its point down the pit. Next point of the triangle is the winding-engineman, in the winding-engine-

house above with trembling hands grasping the now useless levers, and his eyes wild so open fixed one on each of the two huge drums old Death is now in control of. With his mouth wide open he watches the rope which has left the cage to look after itself in the pit, come back to whip around and around its drum whistling. The levers, the drums, the ropes – what, what are they all doing – he cries as he feels, as he sees, as he hears – oh, God, help them. Across there the helpless banksman who can give no saving signal, no helping signal – only Thou, O God. The men queued-up waiting for the cage that won't come up this day, or for many a day. They hear the cages crash in the pit, crash against the pit's brick walls, hear the smashing of the wooden guide-timbers, fixed in the pit to prevent the cage ascending from touching the cage descending, hear these guide-timbers snap and smash as Death the swift one takes the ten who a minute before laughingly filed on to the pit-cage leaving us up here to listen – to that. Oh, God, help them. Silence, and what a silence. What a helpless silence. The men and boys who had been waiting their turn to go down stand some of them with their hands to their stomachs, and with a sick look on their faces. They know all of them that deep, round, tubular shaft, they also know where it ends deep down in what they call 'the sump'. Down deep in the sump the ten now are. The possibility of a miracle rouses some to action. 'The pit-men, where are the pit-men?'

The pit-men are those who work between shifts and over week-ends to repair damage to pit-cages and pit-shafts, and once each day, at least, they examine the pit-ropes, the steel wire-ropes attached to the pit-cages, examine them as they are drawn up and lowered slowly for inspection by the winding-engineman. These pit-men work in oilskins an' sou'westers on their heads in many of the pits which are wet pits. Work from the top of the pit-cage in oilskins repairing the pit-shaft where it wants repairing, repairing 'the guides' and the – well, everything that wants repairing

and looking after from the mouth of the pit in the daylight to the bottom of the pit deep down in the 'sump' as it is called.

A couple of pit-men come running, and one who does not wait for his oilskin coat is lowered to see what the state of affairs at the bottom was like. Presently he is drawn up to the surface, and the look on his face is enough. . . . Plenty. The ten who went down in the pit-cage which left the steel wire-rope were dead — it was in all the papers. . . .

Sophie had gone early down to Susan's to 'send' Will to his work with Owen, his boy, and Megan she was going down there to see how Susan was as soon as she had finished cleaning. Then the postman came with a letter from them in America, and in the letter it said that Norah's married daughter had had a baby girl which 'is Megan, after you'. Megan threw her shawl over her shoulders, and with the letter in her hand she ran up to inform the Delaneys that they were great-grandparents to a gel with the Welsh name of Megan now. 'Where's Peg, Dan?' she cried. 'She's upstairs not so good,' he said, standing with a coarse apron before him. 'What do you think — but I must tell Peg first,' she said, going upstairs. 'Skulking in bed you are is it, Peg? Wait till I tell you. Norah's gel in America have had a baby, a gel it is, an' what do you think they've named it?' Peg moved her head on the pillow. 'What?' 'Megan — after me!' 'That's fine.' 'I must send her something — I can't stay long, for Susan's having a baby down the Row — p'raps it have come. How do you feel?' 'Better than I was.' 'You look a lot better, anyway. P'raps I'll be up before night again. Bound to go now to see how Susan is down there. Look after yourself now.' Down she went to old Dan, who now that he had done all the other work, was washing the few clothes that wanted washing as tidy as any woman. He straightened up from the tub to listen to some bits of the

letter from Norah that Megan read out, but she didn't read everything that was in the letter out to him, for there was that between her and Norah concerning him that was made none the sweeter by telling. Norah from her side, with Megan on this side, were seeing to it that the Delaneys, Dan and Peg, would not have to trouble the relieving officer. 'As soon as Peg's better I want you to come an' help me an' Sophie to get the garden down there tidy an' ready for planting, Dan - Oh, here's the priest come to see Peg. Good morning, sir,' she said to the priest, as passing him to go out. A jolly man she thought the priest, after seeing him a few times when calling on the Delaneys.

He, the priest, had a harder job, Megan thought, than the preachers of the chapels. For the preachers of the chapels they only went to see those who were members of their chapels, the 'tidy' people, but the priest he went around all the Irish whether they were 'tidy' or not. Door to door he went through Company Row, Quarry Row, and the other Paddies' Rows of the district. And some there were who said that the priest was not above taking his coat off when necessary. Irishmen who had, when mad drunk, beaten their wives to mark 'em, were by the priest given a hiding they long remembered, some said. Megan couldn't swear to the priest beating one of his flock, but she had more than once when passing the house of an Irishman, heard him roaring inside, the door locked on him and the priest, the woman and her children grouped outside. The Irish people of the place, with the exception of Dan Delaney, and a few more like him an' Peg, were so much for the drink - an' most of 'em next door to the Workhouse all the time. There was talk of building a bigger Catholic church over on the Brecon Road side of the Penydarren Park. So p'raps there were, after all, more 'tidy' Irish people in the place than Megan knew of. Must be before they would want a bigger church.

Thinking of the Delaneys, the priest, and the Irish of the place in general, Megan walked quickly down towards

where Susan lived in the Row. ‘It’s come,’ she murmured on seeing Martha James coming out of Susan’s house. ‘Well?’ she said, running.

‘A gel this time for a change,’ said Sophie dryly.

‘Yes, a gel – just right for the Jubilee. I was just telling Susan to name her Victoria, after the Queen. Gels are not much good to bring these days, now that they’re getting so genteel. Turns their noses up at the brickyard, where some of us had to work hard enough, goodness knows. An’ what if they had to go down the pit same as my mother did when she was no bigger – You didn’t pass my husband with the donkey, Megan?’

‘No,’ said Megan, pushing past her into the house to Susan.

‘I’ll have to go an’ see for him,’ said Martha to Sophie. ‘If I’m not with him going around for the wash he loiters, an’ gabs with one an’ the other.’

‘Sure you won’t have a cup o’ tea before going?’ said Sophie.

‘No – thank you for asking – I must go an’ see where that man have got with the donkey; tell Susan I’ll be down to-night after I’ve sent the man to his work.’

‘Humph,’ grunted Sophie, watching Martha hurrying across the bridge in search of her man and the donkey in the shafts of the up-ended wash barrel, ‘you an’ your pigs’ wash; old grab as you are.’

‘Look, Sophie, isn’t she lovely?’ cried Megan, holding the baby not an hour old in her arms in the shawl.

‘Take that child back to her mother in the bed, you soft – Why did you let this gel pick this new-born baby up out o’ the bed for, Susan?’

‘She wanted to,’ said Susan the half-soaked.

‘An’ you dull enough to let her. There, cwtch her up close to you.’

‘I think she’s the living image of our Moriah,’ said Megan. ‘Oh, the letter. From Norah. Her daughter have had a baby out there in America.’

'Will you drink a cup o' tea, Susan?' said Sophie.

'Yes; when did Martha say I could have a bit to eat?'

'She didn't say,' said Sophie. 'Do you want food now, then?'

'Well, I haven't had any since last night.'

'But let me tell you about the letter an' the baby out in America that they've named Megan after me.'

'That's what I'm going to call this one,' said Susan.

'Not Megan?' said Megan.

'Why not?' said Susan.

'If you do, we won't know who we're talking about all time,' said Megan. 'Now, with little Shon an' his Uncle Shon we're -'

'Here, have this cup o' tea for a start,' said Sophie.

'Anyway,' said Susan, rising on her elbow to take the cup of tea from Sophie, 'that's what I'm going to call her. Ain't it, Megan?' she said to the new-born baby, smiling down on her. 'I tell you what I fancy, Sophie.'

'What?' said Sophie.

'A basinful o' that cawl left from last night. Warm it up in the little saucepan, potch the taters that's in it, then cut the crust from round a round o' the loaf for me.'

'Yes, p'raps that'll be better for you than a lot of old food fried in the pan or anything solid,' said Sophie, going to prepare the broth Susan called 'cawl'.

'That'll be three Megans, then,' said Megan. 'So let's hope that Miriam's married daughter out there in America will bring boys, not gels. For if she brings a gel, an' they call her Megan again, my name will be like a rash here an' in America.' She lifted the shawl to have another look at the baby. 'She's lovely all the same. I could eat her. You're a lucky woman, Susan.'

'How lucky?' said Susan.

'Such fine children, an' now having a gel who'll be able to help you when all your boys are working.'

'It'll be a long time before she's any help to me about the house,' said Susan, sipping tea as she looked down on the baby.

'That's where you're wrong, Susan. The time is not long, worse luck – though p'raps not worse luck. Six times you've been put to bed since what seems like yesterday to me. You was only the little gel next door I used to send on errands when I was a woman looking after my mother an' father. It's me's getting old, God help me.'

'Mind for her to have this drop o' cawl,' said Sophie, bringing it, a basonful, with a thick round of the large loaf stripped of crust. Sighing, Megan walked out of Susan's downstairs bedroom into the living-room, where she stood with a discontented look on her face.

'Haven't you got anything to do, gel?' said Sophie, when coming through the curtain from Susan's bedroom.

'Yes, I've got my bit o' rent to gather, an' then – then wait till next week to gather it again.'

'It's pay rent, not gather it, most people must, so don't stand there on such a fine day like if you was on your way to the Workhouse. Go for a bit of a walk.'

'Yes. What time will you be home to-night?'

'After I've tended to 'em all here, an' seen the boys to their beds. About ten o'clock I'll be up.'

'S'long, Susan,' said Megan, pushing her head through the curtain.

'S'long for now,' said Susan, speaking with her mouth full of crustless bread.

'Look after yourself,' said Megan as going.

'I will,' said Susan.

Over in front of the Nelson public-house Megan met old Dai Balaclava in charge of the team of Workhouse inmates yoked to the Workhouse's firewood sales truck. 'Oh, how's it looking for the price of a pint, Megan fach?' said Dai, as soon as he saw her. He was walking the pavement, the four men he was in charge of were stood on the hard road,

two in front, and two behind the truck. Two of the team were harmless 'softies' and willing workers. They were in front doing the pulling. The two in their senses were behind, from where they did a little pushing, and holding back when travelling downhill, the truck usually empty when travelling downhill back to the Workhouse. Dai Balaclava, whose hair was white as snow now, walked the pavement like a commercial traveller for the Workhouse's firewood supply business. But he was dressed same as all the others in the Workhouse in cream-coloured corduroy. Coats square-cut, and the trousers roomy.

'Pint?' said Megan. 'For you to get drunk an' be stopped coming out again?'

'Shush, don't shout,' said Dai Balaclava. 'Haven't had a sneak to-day yet — nor a bit o' 'bacco either.'

'I'll get you 'bacco,' said Megan, turning to go into the shop below the Nelson public-house.

'No, no, Megan fach,' said Dai Balaclava, holding her by the arm; 'it's a pint I'm dying for. I've got 'bacco.'

'Then on you be the blame if you get drunk,' said Megan, giving him a threepenny-piece. 'How are they all up there?'

Dai told her hurriedly how 'they' up in the Workhouse were these days. He was in a hurry to slip into the Nelson to wet his whistle, so he didn't particularise. The four before and behind the Workhouse truck on the hard road stood looking about vacantly. 'I'll see if they want a sack in here,' Dai Balaclava called to them as he disappeared into the Nelson. 'Thank you, Megan fach.'

'You'll do,' said Megan, going on her way after her bit o' rent. That gathered, she went to Pegler's the grocer to order her goods, for she was 'dealing' in Pegler's now. Two of the young men behind the counters there were singing in Dan Bach's choir with her, and one night after practice one of them had persuaded her to 'give Pegler's a trial'. So she had stopped 'dealing' at William Harris's, where she had been dealing for years, to 'give Pegler's a

trial'. The young men they said so nicely: 'Yes, Miss Davies - an' the next thing, please.' For Megan always went with her money to pay in her hand. So, 'Yes, Miss Davies' it was.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREAT APOSTASY; AND THE GREAT BLONDIN

IN the morning the letter came from Moriah to say that she was on her way out to America again. On the paper and on the envelope as well, there was the name and picture of the Liverpool hotel she had written from. ‘What do you think of her for a sister then?’ cried Megan after she had read the letter aloud for Sophie to hear. ‘Gone again. An’ not once have she been to see me since she came from there. Go you, my fine lady. I won’t bother to write to her any more. You’d think – But no. I haven’t complained before. She’ll do. Burn her old letter out o’ the way.’ She went to throw it into the fire, but turned left instead to put it away in the drawer with the others. ‘To sing opera, is it? Well, you don’t come to Merthyr to sing opera or anything else,’ she said to the letters an’ things in the drawer, before locking it to turn and ask Sophie: ‘Why don’t you say something? not sit there like – like I don’t know what?’

‘What good me say anything between you?’ said Sophie. Megan was still nasty when Joe came up from Cardiff late that evening. ‘Why didn’t you write in a letter to say you was coming for me to put a bed ready from under mine or Sophie’s?’ she said when she came down from bed in her nightdress and with a shawl over her shoulders to let him in.

‘I didn’t make up my mind until late this evening. Don’t bother to wake Sophie.’

‘Sophie is awake, for it was she heard you knocking before I did.’

'Then tell her not to put herself out, for I can get in at the Castle Hotel. Plenty of room there over the weekend.'

'Indeed you're not going to the Castle Hotel. Too fond of old hotels you all are. That Moriah - but never mind her. I'll boil the kettle to make you -'

'No, no, nothing for me, for I had supper before leaving Cardiff. This is what I came up for,' he said, handing her a cheque. 'That's for the thousand you let me have, with interest at five per cent.'

'A thou - Joe bach, you haven't made that much money since I signed my hand for you, have you?'

Joe laughed. 'Oh, yes, I have. Yes, and more.'

'Well, well, well, well, money like dirt there must be down Cardiff. But I didn't ask for any old interest.'

'I know you didn't, neither would you be getting it were it not that your money earned me a hundred per cent.' He clapped his hands together to rub them in a way expressive of satisfaction. 'We've done very well in a short time. I don't think that I shall ever require further assistance from you. You've helped me considerably, Megan. If it hadn't been for you - But now that I'm going in with Edith's father -'

'Edith? Who's Edith then?'

'The young lady I'm engaged to. Didn't I write to tell you?'

Megan shook her head. 'First I've heard of it, Joe bach.'

'I'm almost certain - Anyway, I'm engaged to one of the nicest girls, she'll be coming up to see you soon. Yes, Edith's a fine girl.'

'No doubt. But to think of you going to marry, Joe bach.'

'You talk as though I were a youngster, Megan. Isn't it time I thought about marrying and settling down? I'm within a month of thirty, you know.'

'Yes, sure to be,' said Megan flatly, sitting there in her

nightdress, with the shawl over her shoulders and the cheque for such a lot of money in her hand.

'I shall have to get back to Cardiff with that first train in the morning, so perhaps we'd better be thinking about bed. I promised to go to church with her in the morning.'

'Church, not chapel, she is then?'

'Yes, Church of England - she's English. Devonshire, that's where her father came to Cardiff from. But Edith herself was born in Cardiff.'

'Pity she's old church,' said Megan.

'Pity? Don't be silly, Megan. Church? Chapel? What difference does it make?'

'A lot of difference, my boy.'

'I'm sorry you think so, for I shall be going to church with her from now on.'

'You? Church?' said Megan, rising to her feet.

'Yes, I'm soon to be confirmed. But don't look so - '

'Be made a member, do you mean?'

'In the church they don't call people members. Same thing, of course.'

'Then you're leaving the chapel to go to the church?'

'Yes, I suppose that's what it amounts to,' said Joe lightly. He even laughed before saying, 'I don't recollect your ever having been shocked by the fact that Llewelyn and Sam married Catholics.'

'They married 'em, but they didn't leave their chapel for 'em,' said Megan, speaking and looking like her father sometimes used to. Like stone her face was setting as she looked almost with horror at her 'baby' who, in her opinion, was about to commit the unforgivable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost of Nonconformity. 'I don't care who you marries, an' the gel may be every bit as tidy a gel as Norah is, but you mustn't leave the chapel for her. You haven't done it yet, have you?'

'Practically. I've attended confirmation classes - '

'But you haven't done it yet, that's the main thing, Joe bach. You tell the gel - an' if she's anything like a gel

she'll be a-willing – that it's not right for you to leave your chapel. Say you won't make her 'tend chapel with you, any more than our Llew' makes Norah.'

'Please, Megan, don't be so absurd, so old-fashioned. I've told Edith and her people – '

'I don't care what you've told 'em. You mustn't do it, do you hear. You shan't do it – no, you shan't. Old-fashioned, is it? Listen, my boy. We in the chapel had to pay dear to come free from what you're talking about going back to. Chapel our family have been since the time when the old church used to send its soldiers to cetch our people in Cwmglo. If your father was only alive he could tell you more than I can about how – '

'I don't want to be told anyth – '

'But you're going to be told – yes, an' by me, who've – But I don't want to talk about what I've done for you more'n for any of the others. No, leave that go – but you're not going to let your chapel go for some old gel down Cardiff who is church. You must tell her straight – '

'I'll tell you straight, Megan, instead. You leave Edith – '

'You an' your Edith. The chapel is more than you an' your Edith, more'n anybody, more'n everybody in this old world.'

'I can see it's no use talking to you. I'm going to bed.'

Megan ran past him to turn about and hold up her hand. 'Not to bed in my house if it's church you're going to be,' she said. 'The Castle Hotel, you said, would put you up. Then go there, for that's the place for them who are church. Glad I am now that you put interest to what you owed me. More fool me for lending it to you, more fool me for rising your sleeve like I have all these years. There's the door, my boy.'

'Now, Megan – '

'There's the door, I said.'

'What's the matter down there?' Sophie from the landing called down.

'Nothing for you to bother your head about,' Megan called back. 'Go to your bed, Sophie.'

'Well,' said Joe, 'if that's how you feel —' Out of the house he went, leaving the door open. Megan closed, locked and bolted it after him. Then she walked stiffly along the hallway, past the foot of the stairs, to the room where the fire was, where the candle was alight in its stick on the table. She sat in the arm-chair, the cheque for all that money crumpled up in her hand. Dead she felt. She had driven him out, and he was the last. The one she had done most for had to be the one to do this to her. Anything but that she could have forgiven him. The old church, leaving Zoar for the old church. . . . 'And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar.' Never would she forget John Thomas from the pulpit reading that '—unto Zoar.' People had left Zoar for other chapels — and that was bad enough, goodness knows. But it was to other chapels they went, not to the old church, no, not to the old church like you, Joe, have gone to shame me. Many people had in a body left Zoar to build for themselves another chapel — not an old church, Joe. If it was Baptist, Methodist or Welsh Wesleyan he had gone to please that gel in Cardiff whoever she is, I wouldn't have minded a lot. But the old church which she had heard one preacher after the other, in the meeting to demand Disestablishment, call 'a foreign plant here in Wales', and other things they called it as well. And right the preachers were, she with tears running down her face now thought. Quite right, the preachers were. And it was to that 'foreign plant', to the foreigners who — let him go. But not in my house. Nice talk there'll be when people get to know that Joe, *her* Joe, the boy she had done so much for, been so proud of —

'Are you trying to catch your death o' cold down here with nothing but your nightdress on?' Sophie, with a quilt over her nightdress like a shawl, was saying. 'Where is that boy?'

'Gone.'

'Gone? Out the back, do you mean?"

'No - gone. Gone to the old church.'

'What are you talking about, gel?"

'About him, about my Joe going - Oh, Sophie, Sophie.'

'There, there,' said Sophie. 'Whatever it is, no better you cry to make yourself bad. Come on back to bed, there's a good gel.'

For weeks after that night Megan went about like a woman going into decline or something. Sophie couldn't make her out, for she, Sophie, couldn't make head or tail of the little that Megan had told her of what happened the night Joe came so late, and left before Sophie as much as set eyes on him. So Sophie was glad when Shon drove over from somewhere in his trap. Looking like a lord he was sitting high up in the trap with driving gloves on his hands holding whip and reins. Looking so jolly, 'p'raps he'll shake this gel out of what's troubling her,' said Sophie to herself.

'Hullo, Sophie. How are you?' he cried as she opened the door. 'I'm all right,' she said as he passed her in. 'An' where's Megan?' 'Hullo, Shon,' sighed Megan. 'Hullo - You're not looking very well, Megan.' 'I'm all right - why don't you sit?' 'She's far from being all right,' said Sophie from behind Shon. 'If it's the truth you want, then she's breaking her heart over that old boy down there in Cardiff.' 'Shut up, Sophie,' said Megan. 'I won't shut up for you to send yourself to the grave. She don't eat, she don't sleep - ' 'Shut up, an' put a cup o' tea for Shon when I tell you, Sophie.' 'Tea, tea, tea, that's what she's been living on for weeks now,' said Sophie, flapping the tablecloth open. Megan went to the pantry to fetch the bread an' things.

After what Sophie called 'a scrap meal', she cleared the table before leaving for Susan's house down the Row. 'Talk some sense into this gel if you can,' she said to Shon

as going. 'Go now,' said Megan. 'Where did you come from now?' she asked Shon.

From the west, he said, from places in the Swansea valley, Llanelly, and places further west. Little goldmine he said Llanelly was. The tinplate- and steel-workers of the west had more money to spend than the stone-coal colliers down there. Any amount o' money to be made down there. 'All the same, I'm coming back to Merthyr again. There's something about this old place. . . . But what's the trouble between you and Joe, Megan?'

'Oh, you mustn't listen to Sophie. When did you hear from Moriah last?'

'A couple o' days ago – I think I've got the letter on me.' He felt in his inside-pocket. 'No, in my other clothes. San Francisco she was singing at then. Some man, Mapleson, I think she said his name was, hired her to go on tour – But you might as well tell me what the trouble is between you and Joe. For there is something, that a blind man could see. I'm no stranger by this time, so if there's anything I can do. . . .'

'Nothing. No, nothing, Shon,' said Megan, rising from the chair to walk the floor between the table and the window. 'He's gone – an' that's all about it. He's getting married. Yes, an' to please the gel he's marrying, he's leaving the chapel to go to the old church with her. Yes, for always. An' he had the face to come here to tell me, me that's put him where he is, that he was leaving the chapel for ever. So I showed him the door. An' – an' now you know,' she concluded, starting to bite the nail of her right thumb as she sniffed and snivelled.

'H'm,' said Shon. He sat trying to think of something helpful to say. 'He – ' He coughed and stopped, leaving the sentence unfinished. He had nearly said that Joe had not in deciding to go to church instead of chapel committed a sin, but knowing Megan he stopped just in time. That, he remembered, was not the way to help. She loved Joe with a double love, with the love of a sister and with the

love of a mother. She had had him to look to from when little more than a child, and now that everything that had bound them was snapped –

'I'd rather see him dead,' said Megan, looking out through the window.

'Oh, no, you wouldn't,' said Shon soothingly.

'Oh, never mind him, shut up about him,' she cried.

Shon rose to his feet. 'I'll go to see the pony right, then I'll come back up. Perhaps then – Anyway, we'll see.'

For a few weeks after his vans had arrived Shon tried to think of some way of easing the strain between Megan and Joe. At last he went down to Cardiff to see Joe. Then, the following Saturday morning, when, as luck would have it, Sophie was bad in bed, they came. With a coarse apron before her, the sleeves of her bodice turned up above her elbows, old slaps on her feet, and a cloth same as a brickyard gal's cloth covering her hair, Megan was on with her cleaning. It was long since she had had the chance to show Sophie that she hadn't forgotten how to clean a house from top to bottom. With Sophie in bed out of the way she had decided to have a sort of field-day. The chairs of the room she was now tackling were legs up on the couch, the things off the mantelpiece were all down on the table, everything was, if not upside-down like the chairs, out of its place just then.

'Hullo,' shouted Shon as he opened the front door and walked in. 'I've brought somebody to see you, Megan.'

It was Joe, an' some young woman with him. 'This is Edith, Megan,' Joe said. Like a wooden dolly Megan stood whilst a lovely girl brushed past Shon and Joe to kiss her.

'Er – er, won't you sit?' spluttered Megan, up-ending one of the chairs and dusting it. 'I'm in the middle of cleaning – didn't know – '

'Here, we'll give you a hand,' laughed Shon, putting chairs right way up.

'Where's Sophie?' said Joe, as righting a chair.

'Bad in bed with me,' said Megan. 'I'll do that.'

'Sophie, my dear - you remember - my sister's housekeeper, she's -'

'She's not your sister's housekeeper for one thing,' said Megan sharply, before turning to face Edith. 'Joe is saying wrong, my gel. Sophie's not my housekeeper. She's my friend, Sophie is. She used to work with me and my sister, the one they calls Madame Moriana, in the brickyard years ago.' Then with a like it or lump it look on her smudged face she added: 'Now take the young woman out the garden in the back for a bit till I clean myself to put a bit o' food for her.'

'Yes, come along,' said Shon, leading the way out, Edith following, Joe last. But Joe he didn't go out. No, stopped by the back door to shut it before turning about to look at Megan. He didn't say anything, neither did she for a bit. Went on with her work. 'Well?' Joe said. 'Are we to stay?'

'Didn't you hear me tell her that I was putting food?'

Joe smiled as intercepting Megan on her way to swill her hands an' face. 'What do you think of her, Megan?'

'When I've had chance to look at her I'll tell you.'

'You're looking at me.'

'Yes, I'm looking at you.'

'Anything wrong with me?'

'Leave it there now - an' leave me go to swill a bit o' my hands an' face before she comes.' Joe bent to kiss her, and then Megan started crying. 'Why old softness to make me cry my eyes red for her to see?' Joe kissed her again before running out to join them in the garden which old Dan Delaney, now that he had nothing better to do, was keeping so tidy for Megan.

In less than a quarter of an hour Megan was calling them in from the garden to have food. Pig's head brawn of her own making she had ready for 'em, and ham for them who didn't like brawn. Edith she liked everything, she said, and especially the home-made bread. 'It's Sophie bakes,'

said Megan. ‘Can’t we go up to see her?’ said Edith. ‘If you like,’ said Megan.

‘Here’s Joe’s young woman from Cardiff come to see you Sophie,’ Megan said.

‘H’m, looks a tidy gel,’ said Sophie from the bed. ‘Sit by there side the bed for me to see you. But where is he?’

‘Downstairs smoking cigars with Shon,’ said Megan, ‘so I didn’t bring ’em up for fear they’d make you cough. You talk to Sophie a bit, Edith, till I come to fetch you.’ ‘Have they had food?’ Sophie wanted to know. ‘Of course they’ve had food. ’Tisn’t only you can put food for people. I’ll come to fetch you in a minute, Edith. Talk you to Sophie.’ ‘Can’t I come down to sit by the fire for a bit with the big shawl over me?’ Sophie asked. ‘No, you can’t,’ said Megan. ‘I want you better, not worse. Joe shall come up to see you before he goes.’

When she went downstairs Megan said: ‘Joe, after you’ve been up to see Sophie, we’ll take Edith down as far as the Row for a walk to see Susan an’ the children.’

Joe wrinkled his nose before asking: ‘Is that necessary?’

‘To be sure it is. Let her see where you came from in the first place, then she’ll never have that to twit you about, my boy.’

‘Perhaps you’re right. But you mustn’t be surprised if the Row shocks her a little. She hasn’t seen many such places.’

‘People down Cardiff who do do their eye good out of the men living in the Row, out of men like your brother Will, takes care their children shan’t see much of places like the Row. But we had to live there, and your brother’s still living there, and the people of the Row are tidy people not to be ashamed of. You may as well come too, Shon.’

‘Now don’t make a May-day show of it,’ said Joe grumpily.

‘The people in the Row are entitled to something they can talk about every now an’ then. It was Shon – you sly

old thing you – said better you come here to-day, wasn't it? Well, let him come with us now. Go you up to fetch Edith, Joe. Once you've showed her through the Row, she'll never be able to say that you drawed the feather across her eyes. Pity you didn't bring her father up with you.'

'Oh, he wouldn't mind, for he's an old sea-dog,' said Joe as he went upstairs to fetch Edith down.

'Not that I could relish in the Row any more, Shon,' said Megan, as she combed a bit of her hair before putting her hat on and pinning it to her hair with three hatpins big enough for men to fight duels with. 'But it's best for people to know all about us at the start.' 'Here we are,' said Joe, none too jolly. 'You didn't stop long with Sophie,' said Megan. 'Come on, then. We're off down as far as the Row for a bit,' she called up to Sophie. 'I'll lock the door an' take the key with me. We won't be long – eh?' 'I didn't say anything,' Sophie called out. 'Mind you stay in bed. I wouldn't be surprised to find her down cleaning after me when we come back,' Megan said as she led the way out. After she had locked the door with a big key too big for any pocket she had, she held it in her hand as they walked along. 'If Sophie was out I'd put the key under the stone, but not when she's in bed. But the last time when she was bad in bed – it was the day I had to gather my rent – she was up washing a few things when I got back. That's the way she is.'

She talked an' talked, Edith smiling and saying a word occasionally. Slowly and deliberately Megan paraded them across the bridge towards Susan's house. 'That's where *we* used to live,' she said, pointing to the house next door to Susan's, watching Edith's face. 'Indeed,' said Edith, looking interested. 'Nice little houses.'

'They're all right,' said Megan. 'My brother and his wife an' their six children lives in this one. Hullo, Susan.' Loudly she said, for the women on their doorsteps to hear: 'Here's our Joe's young woman from Cardiff come to see you.'

Edith was game, ay, as game as she was lovely, Megan had to admit. 'Yes, she'll do,' she murmured to Shon as Edith took the baby girl, Megan, from Susan, to nurse it a bit. Somehow the child seemed to fit into her arms. "Tisn't often she'll go to a stranger," said Susan. 'But I'm not a stranger,' said Edith. 'Am I, Megan?' she asked the baby in her arms. The baby smiled as wetting her. 'Oh, give her to me quick,' cried Susan. 'No, it's all right, really it is,' said Edith. 'Let me have her to put a napkin on her before she goes from bad to worse,' cried Susan. Joe with a smile on his lips and a scowl in his eyes, offered Edith his large pocket-handkerchief to repair the - well, damage, deluge, or whatever you like to call it - to Edith's silk bodice. 'It's nothing,' said Edith, dabbing the wet part with the pocket-handkerchief. 'What did you want to wet the lady for?' Susan asked the baby she was putting a napkin about after the damage had been done. 'Oh, don't scold her,' said Edith. 'I'm not, I'm only asking her,' said Susan. 'What good ask a baby?' said Megan. 'Oh, they knows,' said Susan. 'There, you're safe to handle now,' she said. 'Then let me have her again,' said Edith, her arms out, and the baby as though wanting to make amends, her arms out too. Hair nearly red the baby had, and two round blue eyes almost as childish as her mother's eyes. Her skin was smoother than the smoothest velvet, her mouth with five new teeth in let out the sweetest gurgles like little boats sailing on waves of sweet breath. Her nose was hardly a nose yet, neither were her ears like two pretty sea-shells very big either. The fingers of the hands she reached with to touch Edith's cameo brooch were like the unopened blossoms of those flowers which when open have petals, but before they open are closed pencil-shaped like this baby's fingers. It was altogether lovely, thought Edith only. The others took but little notice of the baby, and when Edith drew their attention to something the baby was doing, the others only said: 'H'm, h'm,' or 'Yes, nice little thing.' Then Joe said: 'Hadn't we better be going, dear?'

'What, before I meet your brother?' said Edith.

'But it'll be some time before he's home.'

'Oh, no,' said Susan, 'he ought to be here by now, for they finishes at two on Saturdays,' she explained to Edith. 'About three to ha'-past him an' the boy are here to their taters an' meat.'

'Then we'll wait,' said Edith.

'Shall I put a cup o' tea for you now before they come?' said Susan.

'They've just had a bellyful o' food up at our house,' said Megan.

'But a cup o' tea to drink?' said Susan.

'No, no, no tea for me,' said Joe.

'How about you?' said Susan to Edith.

'I'd like a cup of tea to drink.'

'Then you shall have it in one minute.'

'I'll smoke a cigar out on the baili,' said Shon. 'How about you, Joe?' 'Yes,' said Joe. 'Excuse me, dear.'

Will's boys, David, Morgan, Shon and little Edwin, returning from play, found their two rich uncles smoking cigars out on the baili, so they didn't trouble to go into the house. Joe they did not know as well as their Cheap Jack uncle, whom they knew by this time could be relied upon. He readily obliged again, and Joe their other uncle followed suit, so they went with silver money in their hands back the way they had come, out on to the main street where the shops were. The ha'penny each they got on Saturdays after their father brought his pay home they could now afford to turn their noses up at. Their father and their brother Owen on their way home from the pit were surprised to see the four boys coming out of a shop with penn'orths in their hands. 'Hoy, what have you lot been up to?' cried their father. 'Us haven't been up to anything, dad,' David up and said for himself and the others. 'Uncle Shon an' Uncle Joe gave it to us an' told us to go an' buy. You ask 'em. They're out on the baili in front of our house smoking cigars.'

'Give us a share,' said Owen, the pit-boy, holding his hands out to the others.

'Come on, what do you want that stuff for?' said his father. 'Your taters an' meat'll do you more good.'

With their jaws working the four boys watched their father and their brother go towards the house. 'Hullo, I thought the bums were in or something,' laughed Will as nearing the house. 'How be, Joe? – I won't shake hands till I wash. Quite a stranger. Shon, o' course, is here robbing the people in that tent of his every night.' 'Come an' see who's here,' said Susan, from the doorway. In Will went to be introduced, after which he said loud enough for everybody in the Row to hear: 'Time Joe was thinking about it –' 'Here's your taters an' meat,' said Susan. 'Our Dai an' Mog an' Shon an' Edwin are spending fine out on the road, our mam,' said Owen. 'Where have they had money to spend?' said Susan. 'Better wash our hands a bit, Owen,' said Will to his son, who was with the knife putting bladefuls of potched taters into his mouth. 'Wha' for?' said Owen. 'Well,' said Will, looking at Edith, 'before eating our taters an' meat.' 'Stop your nonsense an' eat your food,' said Susan, bringing the two-penn'orth o' beer in the bottle out from under the stone in the pantry. Will took it from her and drank half of it out o' the bottle before sitting down to his taters an' meat without washing his hands, as he thought he should have done because that fine young woman now nursing his baby was in the house. 'Yes, time Joe thought about it.' He swallowed what he had in his mouth before asking Edith: 'How much older than our Joe do you think I am?'

'It's rather difficult to judge, er – er, you being so black.'

'Three years older than Joe he is, that's all,' said Megan.

'Yes, an' I've got half a dozen already,' said Will, before laughing like a fool.

'Nothing to laugh about, you fool,' said Susan.

Edith she couldn't help laughing, neither could Megan, for Will he was laughing so hearty. Joe he came in from

the baili holding himself tight, but it wasn't laughter he was holding in. He did hee-haw a spasm before saying: 'Really I think we ought to be going now, for as soon as my brother has finished eating he'll be bathing here - er - er, in the kitchen, you see, dear -'

'Yes, come on,' said Megan. 'You come up to our house after you wash all over, Will. An' come you with the baby for a bit, Susan. For they won't be going back until after -'

'Oh, we shall be leaving for Cardiff soon,' said Joe.

'I don't see why,' said Edith. 'The last train from here to Cardiff will do nicely.'

'That gel,' said Megan to Shon out of the side of her mouth quietly, 'that gel have got a lot more sense than our Joe have.'

Last train back to Cardiff it was. Shon left the conducting of sales to his chief assistant that evening, whilst he and Joe and Will went to have a few at the Castle Hotel. Edith up at Megan's nursed Susan's baby. Edith made Will promise to come to Cardiff to her wedding. 'I'll be there,' said Will.

Megan celebrated the Golden Jubilee year by going twice to Pontypool, once with the train to sing there with Dan bach's choir for the two-hundred-pound prize, which Dan bach's choir won; and the next time she went on the brake to see the man Blondin that there was so much talk about. Everywhere there were posters of the man, showing him high up on a rope in the sky, and with a sack over his head stopping him to see where he was going. 'We must go over to Pontypool to see him, Sophie,' said Megan. 'There'll be 'scursion trains, no doubt.' 'Not for me, there won't,' said Sophie. 'I've never been on the old train, and I'm sure - Blondin or no Blondin - that I'm not going to trust myself to it now. Too old to start going on old trains.'

From there they failed to budge her. Then Shon said

what about a brake for all of us? Shon was still doing business in Merthyr, and grand business with the Jubilee he was doing. Roaring trade he was doing with Golden Jubilee this and Golden Jubilee that, now he was calling his cough lozenges his Golden Jubilee Cough Cure. He had stopped saying that his lozenges were good for Cholera as well, for the old Cholera hadn't been heard of for many years now – not that anybody wanted to hear about it again. Fair play for Shon, he was drinking less these days, and most Sunday evenings he went as tidy as could be with Megan and Will and Susan and the children and Sophie to Zoar Chapel. Sometimes Shon went to the morning service as well, then it was only him and Megan, and a few of Will's boys. For Will was having his long sleep of the week, and Susan and Sophie were seeing to the bit o' dinner for their houses. Yes, Shon was doing very well. Buying property he was, shops as well as houses. He bought one very fine house indeed up there above where there was talk about building a new hospital. He surprised Megan when he told her that he had property in many other places where he had been selling at. Anyway, it was he suggested having a brake to take all the family over to Ponty-pool to see Blondin.

'Then will you come with us in the brake?' Megan asked Sophie.

'I wouldn't mind a ride in a brake – that's with a sober man driving,' said Sophie.

Shon said that he knew the very man. In Castle Lane he had a stables and coach-house, yes, and he had a new two-horse brake with cushioned seats. 'I'll see him,' said Shon. 'How many shall we be?' 'Why, are you coming with us?' said Megan. 'If I shall.' 'Come you – but *you'll* have to pay for yourself. I don't pay for people with plenty money. Let's see. . . . Yes, counting the baby, there's eight down our Will's. Then we three will be 'leven. That's all, isn't it?'

Shon went down there an' then to arrange for the brake,

an' Sophie there an' then put the bakestone on the fire to make bread an' bakestone cake to take to eat on the way and over in Pontypool. Megan put a corner of ham on to boil on the back-kitchen fire before going down to tell Susan about the trip. As she was going she turned in the doorway to ask Sophie: 'But what if it rains?' 'Then it will rain, that's all.' 'No doubt, if it's a new brake like Shon said, then the man have got one o' them sheets to go over a framing when it rains. Keep your eye on that corner of ham out the back-kitchen, see that the water is not left to boil dry for the ham to burn. How much cheese have we got?'

'There's about a half-pound in the pantry.'

'Then I'd better bring a few pounds.'

'Few pounds. Who for? Name o' goodness.'

'There's 'leven of us, remember.'

'Susan's two youngest don't eat cheese.'

'P'raps not little Megan, but that little Edwin have come to eat everything same as his brothers.'

'Go, go you an' bring what you like.'

'How many bottles of that small-beer is there left?'

'Gel, go an' see for yourself, an' let me get on with my bread an' cake.'

Megan found that there were five quart-bottles full of what some called 'small-beer' and others called 'thin-beer'. What it was was herb-beer cunningly prepared by Sophie. 'Yes, plenty small-beer,' she said as going out to see Susan.

The morning came, and about seven o'clock it was when the new brake, with two fine horses, one each side the shaft-pole, stopped outside Megan's house. Then Shon, who had come up with the driver, blew an asthmatic blast on an old coaching horn he had, without permission, taken down from where it had been ornamenting the hallway of the Castle Hotel since the coaching days. 'That's never the rag-an'-bone man so early,' said Sophie. 'No,' said Megan, stood laughing by the window, 'it's the brake,

an' Shon – the old fool as he is – blowing a gas-pipe by the look of it. Ha, ha, ha.'

'I'm not one for a lot of old show,' grumbled Sophie.

Megan opened the window to call out: 'Come you two men to carry this basket out.'

'What's in here?' said Shon when he came to fetch the basket.

'What do you think's in it?' said Sophie. 'A bit o' food not for us to have to pay top-penny for what they sells in tents.'

'A *bit* o' food?' cried Shon, as he and the driver lifted the basket. 'It won't be too much,' said Megan, following with three of the five quart-bottles of small-beer. Sophie coming with the other two said: 'Hadn't we better take the key o' the door with us, gel?' 'No, put it under the stone.' 'But we shall be away till dark p'raps.' 'Nobody'll touch the key nor the house,' said Megan.

Oh, the job they had to place the big basket full of good food safe enough to please Sophie. 'Right,' said Shon at last to the driver, 'I'll drive down as far as the Row. You sound that horn.' 'Do nothing of the kind,' said Sophie. 'Nough old show already.' 'Let him blow it, Sophie gel,' said Megan, the pride of the morning filling her. 'You needn't worry, missus,' said the man in broad English, 'for I couldn't blow it if I tried.' But he surprised himself when he did try.

Down the Row there was a crisis on. There was Will out on the baili looking defiant, wearing a muffler round his neck. In the house Susan with the baby in the shawl ready. 'Come on,' cried Megan as she ran in. 'I'm not coming,' said Susan, 'unless he goes tidy like another man.' 'I'd rather go late to the pit and ask to work a double-shift than go to Pontypool in collar an' sham-front,' shouted Will from outside on the baili. The boys with one eye on the brake and the other on the crisis now at its most critical waited anxiously. 'He's all right in a muffler – who'll know him over there in Pontypool?' said Megan. 'All the

neighbours will see us going,' said Susan. 'Never mind the neighbours, come on,' said Megan. 'Enough old nonsense. Up into the brake all of you.'

The boys like greyhounds sprang for it. 'Shon,' said Will, mounting the wheel of the brake - 'Hoy, there's a step you can use instead of taking the paint off my wheels,' cried the owner. 'Right,' said Will, using the step. 'Yes, Shon, like the man in the circus you drove them two horses over the bridge.'

'Circus I think we are,' said Sophie, for the neighbours were all out on their doorsteps, and Will's two eldest boys were at it already. Scuffling they were for the place up in front with the driver. 'There's not room for one of you up here in front,' said the driver. 'There will be if you go back there,' said Shon, who could drive as well as any driver. So the driver took a seat in the brake for the two boys to sit in front with Shon. 'Cigar, Will?' said Shon, throwing him one before lighting his own. 'Let me have her, Susan,' said Megan, reaching for the baby. 'Try an' blow that horn, Owen,' said Shon. 'Wait a minute for me to get matches,' cried Will. 'Here's matches,' said Shon, tossing a box back over his shoulder before gathering the reins. 'Oh,' cried Sophie as the boy Owen succeeded in blowing the coaching horn. 'All right back there?' said Shon. 'Right away, Shon,' cried Will. 'Mind you enjoy yourselves,' cried the neighbours from their doorsteps.

Shon turned the horses to trot them over the bridge and out on to the hard main road, out of which the two horses with their shoes of steel drew sparks of fire. 'Brake her as you go down the hill into Pontmirlais Square,' nervously cried the driver now a passenger. 'I'll 'tend to the brake, Uncle Shon,' said Owen. 'You blow that horn - or give it to Dai to blow,' said his uncle. 'Leave me to 'tend to the brake.' 'Yes, gi' me a blow of the horn now, our Owen,' cried Dai. 'No fear I won't,' said Owen, wetting his lips for another blow. 'Let your brother have a blow,'

cried Susan from behind in the brake. 'He can't blow it,' cried Owen. 'How do you know if you won't let him try?' said Susan. 'Here you are,' said Owen, digging Dai in the ribs with his elbow. Dai tried to make the horn blast, tried until he was all swelled up like a balloon, but not a blast was heard. 'Give it here,' said Owen, snatching it from him. 'This is the way to blow it.' His eyes nearly out of his head, and his nose running under the strain, Owen blew startling spasms of sound along the narrow street. Gasping he was by the time the brake was clear of the town.

Stretches of the road were being threatened by mountains of pit-refuse moving to block it. 'Time they stopped tipping here,' said Will. It was a dirty as well as a Golden Jubilee, for by this time the pits and levels had covered with pit-refuse nearly every bit o' green there was. As they neared the township of Troedyrhw Will cried: 'Let's sing, let's show these people down this Vale how Merthyr people can sing. Hit the note, Megan fach.'

Singing their way along roads between man-made mountains of pit refuse, along roads bitten out of the high sides of natural mountains, as going over bridges, and under viaducts spanning valleys from bluff to bluff, viaducts going over townships, the river, the road and the railway and canal. Singing. Then when they came to a place where there was still a green meadow which pit refuse had not come within sight of, Shon pulled up for refreshments. There was a stream not polluted running through the green meadow, and beside the stream they all sat to have food which they washed down with Sophie's home-made small-beer. Grand.

Into Monmouthshire now, Owen refreshed making the coaching horn go 'ra-ta-ta-ta'. Shon as driving along naming places strange to the others, for he knew them through having done business in 'em as Cheap Jack. All the places along the industrial belt he knew, that black belt nearly a hundred miles long from east in Monmouthshire,

across the face of Glamorganshire, and far west into Carmarthenshire. The black, rich belt. Deeper the pits were being sunk to richer seams of coal, bigger the works were being made to cope with the demand for steel. Under the leadership of Mabon, and under the sliding-scale agreement, the miners were working regular. Strikes a thing of the past, and more and more people were investing their money in the coal of South Wales and Monmouthshire. There was talk during Jubilee year of building decent houses for the miners and steelworkers who by their labour were enriching an ever-increasing army of shareholders, some of whom said that the miners and steelworkers were entitled to much better living conditions. No doubt after the rejoicings of the Golden Jubilee something would be done to provide the houses so badly required. We had had the schools, and now all the miners' and steelworkers' children 'tending school had had their Jubilee mug. In one of the papers it said, after commenting on the loyalty of the people of South Wales, it said in the paper that a great change for the better was soon to take place. But Will an' his likes they did not read the papers for they could not, an' they didn't bother to ask their children now able to read to read out of the paper for them. There was only one house in the Row that took a paper, *The Merthyr Express* on Friday mornings that one house took. That house took it because the woman before she was married was a servant in Penydarren House, where she had got used to having a paper to read a bit out of. Good job that everybody was not like Will an' his sort. There were many in the town who took a paper every day to read. Looking at Will in the brake smoking another of Shon's cigars anybody'd think he was somebody. But he was nobody. Just an underground haulier, that's all. Didn't know what was in the paper about the change for the better that was coming fast. No, singing he is now again.

'Here we are,' said Shon, when they got into the cobbled yard behind one of the public-houses of Pontypool. They

had had trouble getting through the main street of Pontypool, which in places was narrower than the main street of Merthyr. An' the people – 'Millions of 'em,' said Dai to his brother Owen. 'Don't talk daft,' said Owen. 'Do you know how much a million is?' "Course I do," said Dai, but he didn't all the same.

On foot now to the Park. 'For goodness' sake, look to those children, Will,' cried Susan. She was carrying little Edwin not for him to be trodden under foot, Megan was carrying the baby, her namesake, Will, riding little Shon on his back, was breasting a way through the crowd for the others to follow, Shon, with a cigar in his mouth, was carrying the basket in which there was still another bite o' food for them all, Sophie, carrying two quart-bottles of her small-beer, for the other three had been emptied back there where they stopped to have food on the way here, an' a man who had had plenty by the look of him shouted to Sophie: 'How's it looking for a drink, missus?' 'Humph, the old English,' muttered Sophie. Hardly a word o' Welsh to be heard in the place, but Will explained that they were in Monmouthshire where little Welsh was spoken. 'Keep close to me, you three,' he shouted at Owen, Dai and Mog. 'We're all right, you look after yourself,' said Owen as cheeky to his father as anything. Megan had the money in her hand ready to pay to go into the Park, but Shon with the basket on his arm pushed past her with his cigar in his mouth an' gave the man by the gate a sovereign before she could stop him.

Inside the Park things were easier, thank goodness, for it was much bigger than the Penydarren Park in Merthyr, and in this Park Shon said a hundred thousand people wouldn't be what you could call a crowd. Sophie, after pushing her way in with the two quart-bottles of small-beer said: 'I must sit down a minute now,' an' she sat down. Little Shon, now down off his father's back, and eager to be off to where what he called 'the shows' were, pointed to old Sophie, seated gasping on the grass, and said: 'What

did you want to bring her for, bopa Megan?' 'What did we bring you for? you cheeky little imp you,' said his mother. 'Let me carry them bottles now, Sophie,' said Shon. 'I'll put 'em in the basket with the food.'

Away they went as a body to join the immense crowd seated and standing on a slope. 'There it is,' cried little Shon, pointing upwards and forwards at the ropeway stretched between two long uprights, 'up there the man is going to walk, our mam. An' if he falls down from up there - '

'Come on,' said his father, catching his hand. 'I'm not particular about these shows, it's the timbering competition I want to see. For there's some fine timbermen in these Monmouthshire valleys. Some of 'em came from these valleys over to Merthyr to compete. Talk about using a hatchet....'

'We'll see as good here as anywhere, I think,' said Susan.

They sat down on the slope to wait for the great Blondin. The immense crowd was mainly composed of the working people of the dozen or so Monmouthshire valleys, the majority of them English-speaking only. But they looked much the same as their more Welsh fellow-workers of the next county of Glamorgan. The same modest way of holding themselves, the same modest look about them, the same coal-scars on hands and faces. It was the work which made the men - ay, and the women - of the three counties along the industrial belt look alike.

'Here he comes - is it? - yes, this is him,' cried Owen.

The immense crowd closed and leaned forward as a man wearing soft shoes over soft shoes, and a sort of cloak over his shoulders, came with his eyes looking downwards from the artistes dressing-tent towards one of the two uprights. An attendant followed him. The chatter of the huge crowd died away as the great Blondin ascended the stepped upright to reach the small square of staging up on a level with the rope. Up there, on the little railing back and both

sides the square of staging, rested Blondin's balancing-pole. Under this he ducked to slip off his sleeveless robe, which he allowed to flutter down to the attendant waiting for it on the safe ground far, far below. In tights Blondin now stood wiping his hands professionally with a large handkerchief. At least forty thousand eyes on him when he picks up his pole to venture out on the ropeway. He walks it, runs it, kneels on it, before turning about to trot back to the square of staging to bow his acknowledgment of the applause coming up to him from far, far below. The almost breathless crowd blackening the green slope watch the man - the mad fool, many think - blindfolding himself up there. Not satisfied with the handkerchief he must put a sack with armholes in it over his head - 'Oh, my God,' whimpers a woman. He feels for his balancing-pole, and when he has grasped it he puts a questing foot forward to paw the rope a little. He's off the bit o' staging, he's out on the ropeway as blind as a bat. Only the birds in the trees around remain unperturbed as the madman that he is - right out in the middle of the ropeway - turns about to stand swaying facing the other direction. Starts now on his return journey to the square of staging and safety. Will he get there? The sure feet one after the other along the ropeway, the hands of balance grasping the pole - A-a-ah, he - no, he's all right. Nearly there now. Another - he's there. The crowd below breathes again as the man high up with one hand pulls off the sack, as with the other he tears away the handkerchief before bowing and smiling down on the applauding crowd. 'He didn't fall after all,' said little Shon. 'Why, did you want the man to fall?' said his mother. Little Shon didn't say anything. 'I'm going to see where they're holding the timbering competition,' said Will. 'That's more to my taste than these shows they've got here. Don't move from here so as I'll know where you are.' 'Mind you don't stray into the beer-tent,' said Susan. 'Why, is there one here?' said Will. 'I expect so.'

Off went Will to watch the timbermen of Monmouthshire at work, which Will was keenly interested in. For it was underground timbermen kept underground roadways safe for underground hauliers such as Will to travel along behind their horses, riding their 'guns' like jockeys ride horses, not quite the same as jockeys riding, but something like, for the underground haulier he is crouched on the 'gun' between his horse's tail and the iron tram the way a jockey is sometimes seen crouched up on his horse. But the timbermen are using their hatchets, 'notching' timber, and Will lines up with the others to watch critically. First the timbermen with their hatchets 'notch' the two side-arms – they are working on nine-feet props about two feet in circumference. They only 'notch' one end of the prop from about six inches back to make a razor-edge of timber. These side-arms of timber are by the timberman and his butty up-ended to the perpendicular, their butts about nine feet apart, but the 'notched' heads are not so far apart, for the timbers lean forward from their butts. Now that the timber side-arms are in position, the timbermen proceed to 'notch' in a different manner the two ends of what is called the collar, which, after it has been 'notched', is placed to fit horizontally across the nearly upright timber side-arms, the 'notching' like slotting both ends the timber 'collar', fitting closely over pointed ends of the nearly upright side-arms. When they are fitted together so, the three pieces of timber are then what is known as 'a pair of timber', a succession of which keeps up the roof of underground roadways. But why are they erecting them here in the sunshine, where there is no pressure? Because it is an art, that's why, and for long up to Jubilee year it was recognised as an art, the art of keeping the world up so that the world can have coal.

After the judging Will went to pay his respects to the chap from Abercarn who had been awarded first prize. The first prize-winner was now rubbing his hatchet with a stone before covering the razor-like edge first with an oily rag,

then with several thicknesses of sacking. ‘Fine work,’ said Will, pointing to the winning pair of timber. ‘Not a bad pair o’ timber,’ said the winner modestly, spitting on his rubbing-stone.

‘Not bad?’ said Will. ‘A damned fine pair o’ timber, that’s what I call it. That would stand more squeeze than a pair o’ cogs any day.’

‘A cog is one thing, a pair o’ timber’s another,’ said the winner.

‘Quite right,’ said Will. ‘Different – for anybody can throw a cog up.’ By ‘cogs’ Will he meant the double criss-cross timber structures packed with rock and rubble which are in the pits generally erected under the first layer of rock roof, the rock roof nearest the coal, to help resist the first onslaught of the general, never-ending pressure. Will was not right in saying that ‘anybody can throw a cog up’, but what he no doubt meant was that it was not an art like the ‘standing’ of ‘pairs of timber’ undoubtedly is. ‘Yes, a grand pair o’ timber,’ said Will after another critical look at it. ‘No haulier would be afraid to drive under timber like that. I’m a haulier.’

‘Oh, ay,’ said the timberman, tenderly wrapping the edge of his hatchet in the oil-rag. ‘Which valley?’

‘Oh, I’m from over Glamorganshire. Will you come somewhere to let me stand you a drink?’ said Will.

‘I don’t drink,’ said the timberman, putting the sacking over the oily rag covering the edge of the hatchet.

‘Well –’ Will scratched his head. ‘T.T., is it. Then what can I offer you to show – to – well, to show what I think o’ that pair o’ timber?’

The timberman stood up, his hatchet now under his arm, with the covered edge pointing to his heart. ‘Offer me your hand,’ said the timberman. ‘With all my heart,’ said Will. They shook hands. ‘S’long, butty,’ said the timberman. ‘S’long, butty,’ said Will, the haulier. Back to where the others were watching acrobats and listening to the band went Will. Time was getting on. After eating

the food that was left they went to look for the brake. Before starting for home Shon and Will had one drink a-piece. Singing all the way home. Stars came out to welcome them as they drove into Merthyr. A grand day, they all said.

CHAPTER XIX

'ALL BUT ME MARRIED NOW'

MEGAN said she was glad that D. A. Thomas was sent to fill Mr. James's place in Parliament without any old bother, for the one Will insisted was 'a Merthyr boy' was returned unopposed. 'What odds whether he's a Merthyr boy or not?' said Megan. 'The main thing is that he's gone there without any old bother. Now we'll have quiet for a few years.'

She was wrong, for the words were hardly out of her mouth before Henry Richard died after going to Parliament for Merthyr twenty years. Then there was an election, and plenty 'old bother', an' Will – the fool as he was – got a dab in the eye to blacken it for shouting 'good old Pritchard Morgan'. Next morning he was to go with Megan to Cardiff to see Joe married to that Edith down there.

Susan and Megan tried everything, an' the neighbours they did what they could to make his eye look something like. Bathed it with vinegar, steak sixpence a pound they applied to it, all sorts of things they tried. They managed to reduce the swelling round it for him to see out, but the black was as black as black could be all time. 'Must have time like everything else, I s'pose,' sighed Susan, after vainly trying the hot cabbage-water one of the neighbours said had done good to her husband that time. 'P'raps you'll keep your old mouth shut in future, Will bach.'

'Never mind talking about the future,' Megan said. 'He's got to come to Cardiff with me. Haven't they found place for him to sleep an' all?'

Liza from the bottom house ran in to say that the only sure shot was them leeches Wills the chemist kept in a jar. 'A couple or three o' them on it,' said Liza, 'an' they'll suck the bad blood away like a baby having the breast.'

'No, no,' Will shouted shudderingly, 'I'd die first.'

'Or perhaps a poultice of -'

'No more poultices either,' said Will.

'Then come with it like it is,' said Megan. 'We can say that it was a blow in the pit you had with something.'

'He's not going with that eye like it is,' said Susan. 'A black eye is a black eye, an' them down Cardiff knows as well as we do that it's only to be got one way, the way he - the old teeshun-lap as he is - got that. So you can take them bit o' best clothes off when you like, Will. I'm sorry in my heart, Megan fach, but he mustn't go down there looking like that to make simple of us all. When you gives Joe our bit o' present, tell him -'

'Wait,' cried Megan, 'don't take your sham-front an' collar off a minute, Will. Couldn't we cut a piece of an old bowler-hat to make a shade to put over his eye?'

'What?' cried Will. 'A shade for me to look like the old man who stands down by the market with the tin cup in his hand?' He began ripping his sham-front off. 'As soon as I can get into my old clothes I'm going to find the one who gave me this an' give him a couple like it.'

'Simmer you down, Will,' said Susan. 'You'll stay here to keep your eye on little Edwin whilst I go to "send" Megan as far as the station.'

Joe and Edith were meeting Megan at Cardiff, and the first thing Joe said was: 'Where's Will?' Megan had her story ready, a story about Will having been injured slightly down the pit. 'Not much, but he won't be able to wear a shoe for a few days.' 'Oh, what a pity,' said Edith, taking Megan's arm. 'Yes, isn't it,' said Megan. 'Here's Will and Susan's bit o' present.' There was a carriage outside the station, but the man holding the whip and the reins wasn't a cabby, but a coachman working for Edith's father.

He drove to one of the tall houses in Park Place, where Edith's father — some calling him 'Captain' and others calling him 'Bob' — and Edith's mother were both of them like father and mother to Megan. 'My dear Megan,' they said, that, or, 'Megan, my dear.' She was introduced to many from away who had come to Cardiff for the wedding.

That night after Joe had left to go somewhere else to sleep, Edith took Megan out with her to see the house she and Joe were to live in after they came back from their honeymoon. It was just round the corner from her father's house, and Edith said that the house was her father's present to her an' Joe. 'It's a big house for only you two,' said Megan after being shown around. 'I thought that old house o' mine was big enough.' She shut up not for the man painting overtime a room to hear. There were several working by gaslight painting and paperhanging. 'It looks big because it's not furnished, but it's not so big really,' said Edith, 'nothing like as big as our house. But it's quite nice. Garden, stable and coach-house at the back, so when we do decide to have a carriage and pair . . .'

They were outside, and Edith suggested walking to the top of the Place before returning to the house. She did the talking, and Megan she was thinking here am I forty gone, and everybody going from me to somebody or somewhere all the time — all the time.

Edith who was arm-in-arm with her turned her about. The great trees in the Park between Park Place and the Canal showed clear-cut black in the silver moonlight, and somewhere out to sea a ship was hooting mournfully for admission to Cardiff. Again and again it hooted until Megan she could have cried. But what good crying? she thought. Things far off hooting, and this lovely gel holding her arm talking, and the moon behind the trees, and all these big houses, and Joe soon to leave her. . . .

'A penny for your thoughts,' said Edith laughingly.

'How do you mean a penny?' said Megan simply, never having heard anyone say 'A penny for your thoughts' before.

'It doesn't matter,' said Edith. 'I expect you are tired?'

'I am,' said Megan truthfully. Soon Edith was showing her to her room.

She didn't go to sleep for thinking until goodness knows what time. Thinking about Joe, Moriah, about them all, about everything. All but me married before this time to-morrow night. That was what she was thinking when she stopped thinking to sleep.

Next morning when she saw all the men dressed in frock coats and box-hats, she was glad now that Will had had that dab in the eye to blacken it. For put him, she thought, side them men dressed so grand, and he in his bit o' best and his sham-front and collar and bowler-hat, poor Will would look simple enough, goodness knows. A glimpse of passing bridesmaids from where she sat in the corner after an early breakfast made her take stock of her own clothes. None too grand I am too. Never mind, it's not me's getting married. What a lot of people. All the time more coming. Where's Joe then? Edith she knew was upstairs putting her wedding-dress on, an' that's where them other gels are running up to and down from. Edith's father roaring welcomes – he's a jolly man. Edith's mother who has been anxious about some Aunt Amy from Appledore is relieved when she arrives, and there is talk of a boat that travelled by night. Edith's brother, who is seeing to everything for his mother, goes out and comes in all time with an anxious supervisory look on his face. Stands in the doorway counting the heads in the crowded room, then rubs his chin. He smiles as his eyes come round to where Megan sits in the corner out from under feet. Every now and then Edith's father and mother bring ones and twos out of the crush to introduce them to Megan, who didn't have enough talk in her to hold any of those introduced to her for more than a minute. Then where is Joe? she was all the time thinking, her eyes watching the door – but it was Edith's brother came shouting: 'Take your places in the carriages, please.' Edith's mother came pulling her

gloves on across to where Megan was sitting: 'Come on, my dear,' she said, and Megan went with her. Not until she got to the pavement outside the house did she see Edith on her father's arm – talk about looking lovely! She and her father they got into the first of the long line of carriages. Megan and Edith's mother and the one they said was Aunt Amy from Appledore got into the second carriage in line, and owing to the bridesmaids' carriage being too full one bridesmaid had to ride as far as the church with Megan and Edith's mother and that Aunt Amy from Appledore. As they were riding along Edith's mother told Megan that this was the street that had only the year before last been named after the Queen, and that ever since a number of Cardiff people who were never satisfied had been all the time agitating for the street to have its old name back. 'Indeed,' said Megan, wondering where Joe was. That bridesmaid sitting opposite with that Aunt Amy from Appledore she's lovely too, Megan was thinking. As rounding a corner she caught sight of all the carriages following with their loads of well-dressed people, and the carriage-lamps all flower-filled. Joe was being married in style, she thought, remembering the day she went as far as the Merthyr Registry Office with Will and Susan to see them married. Will in the suit she had bought for him an' Susan in the dress the dressmaker on the Tramroad who was not as good as the one over by the Drill Hall had made for her. This wedding of Joe's was different. Things do alter, she thought, wondering who the dressmaker was that made the dress of the bridesmaid she was looking at so lovely.

'Here we are,' said Edith's mother, as the horses stopped outside St. John's Church. The man from in front he jumped down to let down the new patent carriage step for Edith's mother and Megan and the bridesmaid and the aunt from Appledore to step down and out on to the pavement. 'Come on, my dear,' said Edith's mother, taking Megan's arm. For the first time in her life Megan entered

a church of the Church of England, the 'foreign plant', as she had heard many a chapel preacher describe it. Nearly dark it was inside, and the walls gave back the sounds made by feet entering. Megan could hardly see. Edith's mother was kneeling on a cushion to pray, and Megan thought that p'raps there would be no harm even though it were a church and not a chapel if she did the same. She asked God to look after Joe and Edith down here in Cardiff, Moriah in America or wherever she was by this time, Will an' Susan an' the children, Sophie who's looking after the house, Shon where he's selling down in the Rhondda, I think, Dan an' Peg Delaney, an' make Peg better, the neighbours in the Row, the — 'an' that's all for now, Amen,' she said, as she felt Edith's mother rising from her knees. When she had sat up and opened her eyes the place was much lighter, she thought, and she could now see Joe smiling back at her over his shoulder from where he was sitting right up in front with some other young man, his best man, with him. She nodded and smiled back at him. What a lot of people are here now. All these didn't ride down, I'm sure. For all who are here to have ride it would take more carriages than there are cabs old-style and hansom in Merthyr. There was Edith with her father right up the front, across the aisle from Joe an' the man he had with him. Edith's father was right up in front to give Edith to Joe. Well, she wasn't sitting up in front with 'em, but she'd give 'em Joe, who was hers to give after twenty-one years mothering since their own mother died. No need to feel ashamed of the boy either. . . .

Edith's mother was getting her handkerchief ready. 'For I know I shall cry,' she whispered to Megan. 'I always do.' Megan she had her handkerchief in her hand in a ball, but she wasn't going to cry, she thought. Wait a bit though. When Joe and Edith was kneeling before the clergyman who talked solemnly and evenly over the young couple to those assembled, Megan's eyes misted with the dew of her heart. Well, he's as much my boy as Edith is this woman's

gel, an' she's crying, isn't she? She gulped as Joe and Edith turned radiantly, man and wife. Man - and wife. All but me married now.

The choir double-filing out of sight, Edith's mother smiling through her tears, kissing, signing the book, then out to the carriages. Back to the tall house in Park Place, making it ring with happy laughter. Drinking the health of the young couple, who had to hurry to change their clothes to hurry to catch their train. 'Come on, my dear,' said Edith's mother. But the stuff they had given Megan to drink the health of the young couple had gone to her legs as well as her head - it was Edith's father's fault, for he came with the bottle in his hand insisting that Megan should 'drink that and let me give you some more'. Twice he came not knowing that Megan was little used to drink. Now her legs like lead under her, and her head feeling too tight for the skin of it.

'I can't go to the station to "send" them,' she said to Edith's mother.

'Then I'll stay here with you,' said she.

So they, Megan and Edith's mother, stood arm-in-arm on the doorstep waving their hands after the departing carriages. They went in after the last of the carriages was out of sight, went in to cry again for goodness only knows what. 'There, there,' said Megan. 'I shouldn't cry, I know - but didn't she look lovely?' 'Yes, lovely she was - an' didn't Joe look grand too?' 'Joe's one of the nicest young fellows - and one of the luckiest. My Edith is a girl in a million.' 'No doubt, an' Joe is a tidy boy, remember.' 'Joe's a fine boy, but my Edith - Still - I think I'd like a cup of tea. Would you?' 'That's what I've been wanting bad, but I was 'fraid to ask.' 'Don't you ever be afraid to ask for anything in this house.' She rang a bell.

After what they called 'dinner' in that house, Edith's father an' mother took Megan with 'em to the Theatre Royal. 'I don't suppose you've seen Henry Irving?' said Edith's father.

'Henry Irving? No, I don't think I have,' said Megan.
'Is Aunt Amy coming with us?' said Edith's mother.
'No, the night trip on the boat has tired her, so she'll be going to bed early,' said Edith's father. All the young people who had been at the wedding, Megan gathered, had gone dancing somewhere. So it was only she went in the carriage with Edith's father an' mother to the Theatre Royal.

A fine place it was. Something like the place Moriah had taken her to that time in London to hear opera, that time when Megan went to London to sing with the Cor Mawr under Caradog. Now that time was long gone, yet not so long gone either.

'Do you often go to the theatre?' Edith's mother asked, after they had been escorted to their seats by Edith's father, who then returned to talk to some men out by where they were selling the tickets.

'Not to a theatre like this,' Megan said, looking around. 'We haven't got a theatre like this in Merthyr. This is a grand place. We've only got the little wooden theatre in the old works. Then there's the Drill Hall an' Temperance Hall, they haves plays sometimes.' Timidly Megan looked around as the place went on filling with people she thought were dressed like lords and ladies. 'Oh, a band,' she said, as men with instruments came from somewhere like jack-in-boxes to sit in a place which Megan said to herself had a fence along it.

'Oh, the orchestra.'

'Yes, the or-chestra,' said Megan, accepting the correction. 'No band in the little theatre in Merthyr,' she went on as the members of the orchestra waited for the conductor, filling the wait with tuning. 'But we've got the best band anywhere around that plays in Penydarren Park for the sports. Have you heard the Cyfarthfa Band play?'

'Oh, yes, at the Cardiff Flower Show.'

'H'm,' said Megan, as the conductor popped up to start the band playing. Edith's father came to take his seat beside them whilst the band was playing. No sooner than

the band stopped playing the place was made pitch dark in a second to frighten Megan, for the lamp in the little theatre at home was never put out or turned low. But the lights, she now remembered, in that place in London Moriah took her to that time, they was turned out before –

The scene hiding the stage went slowly up, and a lame man with a hump on his back came on by hisself to talk to the people for a bit. But before he should talk there was a lot of people clapping, though what for goodness only knows. Megan didn't like the man from the start. All the time hanging one of his hands like a wet fresh herring, and squinting around at everybody all the time. She liked the three queens though, an' the two little boys she liked as well, God help 'em with that old thing with his hump wanting to kill 'em all time. Then there were some of the men, fair-play for 'em, who stood up straight and talked tidy like men should to people, but as for him with the hump on his back – well, if looks could have killed him he'd have been killed by Megan long before he was killed at last by one of them other men on the stage with him. Megan couldn't make head or tail of it all, but parts of the play moved her almost to tears. The old queen, who was the living image of old Peg Delaney – 'I wonder how she is?' – was the one who touched Megan most when she lamented the day she had given birth to the lame man with the hump on his back. So would I, too, thought Megan, nodding her head, so would I too if our Joe had turned out half as bad as that old – old –

But all the people were clapping like mad for the old thing as he was. In Merthyr's little wooden theatre the villain was nightly hooted off the stage out of sight. That in Megan's opinion was how it should be. Yet here were all these people clapping their hands off for a villain who had proved himself that night to be more villainous than all the villains Megan had ever seen in Merthyr, in the little wooden theatre there. She had a good mind to start hooting, a good mind to stand up to hoot and show these Cardiff

people how we in Merthyr treated villains. If it wasn't that she was with Edith's mother, who was such a tidy woman, and Edith herself such a tidy girl. . . . For their sakes p'raps it would be better for her not to hoot. Anyway, she wouldn't clap the old thing. The carriage was waiting outside the theatre for them.

'Yes,' Megan told Sophie as soon as she reached home next day, 'it was carriages to everywhere. I could have left my legs here with you for all the good they was to me down there. An' if only you seen the lovely house Joe an' Edith are going to live in – an' if you seen the presents they had. A room bigger than this chock-full o' presents they had.'

Sophie listened and nodded until Megan had taken off her bit o' best and put her other clothes on. Then she said: 'Better you go up as far as Peg Delaney's now.' 'Is she worse then?' 'She's no better, God help her.' 'My shawl quick.'

Breathless she was when she opened the door and walked in. Where was Dan? In the middle of the floor she stood to listen. Upstairs the voice of the priest was murmuring consolation. She tip-toed half-way up the stairs to see the priest standing, and Dan kneeling side the bed. The priest placed a hand on old Dan's shoulder, and the hand on the shoulder told Megan more than she had wanted to know. There was Dan kneeling, his eyes shut, remembering the grand woman Peg had been all her days. His neck stretched in agony was stringy, and the veins of his hands clasped, showing purple as on his bended knees he lived the days we were young, God help him. 'Lovely and fair like the roses in the summer, but 'twas not her beauty alone. . . .' The clock below and behind Megan in the living-room tick-tock-ticking indifferently. Megan, with tears in her eyes, tip-toed backwards down the stairs, there in the room below standing trying to think what to say to Dan when he came down. Up there on his knees, God help him. Without thinking she knelt and spoke to God

on his behalf. One day kneeling with them in Church of England, the next kneeling with the old Catholic whose daughter over the sea she loved. The priest in the room above was moving about — p'raps coming down. Up off her knees stood Megan — mustn't let the priest see me, a woman who's a life-long member of Zoar Chapel, kneeling with him in the house. She would make Dan a cup o' tea. Peg's cup she left hanging on the nail.

'I've made a cup o' tea for you, Dan,' she said, when he came, with the priest following him down the stairs.

There was no happier woman in the world than Megan that Sunday when she heard that John Thomas was coming back to Zoar from where he had gone to preach English in some English chapel.

Now, after an absence of about eighteen months, he was coming back to Zoar Chapel, 'to *our* chapel — *his* chapel, to preach only Welsh again,' said Megan. 'Oh, Sophie, I could — let me kiss you.'

That's how most of the members of Zoar Chapel were feeling now that John Thomas was coming back to them. The members of Zoar went about with their eyes ashine, spilling thanksgiving. Seemed to be making a lot of old fuss about the return of John Thomas, thought some who didn't realise what John Thomas meant to the people of Zoar Chapel. Meant quite a lot to them. Hundreds there were who hung themselves without him knowing it around John Thomas's neck. They loved him, that's the long and short of it. No wonder, for back of his eyes there was his soul always. His voice from the pulpit so thrilling, his face — Yes, his face. Once when he was called upon to give evidence in the case relating to John Williams's Charity the judge asked the famous Queen's Counsellor if he wanted to ask the witness any questions, if he wanted to ask John Thomas anything at all, wanted to cross-examine him or anything. The famous Q.C., after one look at John Thomas, shook his head and said no, he didn't

want to cross-examine John Thomas. ‘Who,’ he remarked in a whisper to a learned colleague, ‘who could cross-examine a man with such a face as that man’s?’ The Q.C. was right. To cross-examine John Thomas after he had said the truth would have been almost as bad as cross-examining John Thomas’s Lord and Saviour. There was something about John Thomas which Megan and the rest of the members of Zoar thought sublime. In their opinion there were few men as great as John Thomas walking the earth. . . . ‘Oh, what a welcome we’ll give him, Sophie. . . .’

It was to many rather funny how the members of different chapels of the place almost worshipped their preachers, and how they revered the memories of old preachers who had served them long before passing on. Bethesda Chapel in Merthyr will never, never forget old Methusalem Jones, who for thirty-one years, through Cholera and calamity, served them and inspired them to remain faithful to the end which he assured them was but the beginning of life. A score of chapels, a score of preachers, and John Thomas of Zoar one. Megan at the welcome home service drinking in his every word. ‘Thank you, God, for bringing John Thomas back home to us,’ she said again and again in the short prayer after entering the chapel with Sophie, Susan, Will and the children. She thanked God because in her simplicity she believed that it was God did everything that is done, has been done, and will be done.

‘Oh, what a pity you wasn’t here yesterday, Shon,’ said Megan, when Shon on the Monday morning drove in his trap from some other valley. ‘It was welcome home to John Thomas in Zoar yesterday. Are you coming back to Merthyr to sell?’

Shon shook his head as he felt for a letter. ‘I’ve had a letter from Moriah – you haven’t had one?’

‘No, not this long time. The last I had – was it? – yes, the last I had from her was when she was on her way out to America.’

'Well, she's on her way home again,' said Shon. 'She's been very bad out there.'

Megan snatched the letter out of his hand to read it. 'But why, why didn't she go to them in Scranton when she was took bad like this?' she cried. 'San Francisco's a long way from Scranton,' said Shon. 'Then why didn't she send for 'em from Scranton to go to where she was to fetch her. Any one of 'em would have run to her. But there, what good bother now? She's on the ship - when'll it be here?' 'Friday it should get to Liverpool.' 'Then we must be there to meet her. God help her by herself bad far away from any of us - but she should have sent to Norah or Miriam in Scranton - there I am again. Sophie, our Moriah's on her way home bad from America. She won't be bad long once me an' you have hold of her - for none of your Castle Hotel with her bad, remember, Shon. Sophie, start to get ready for her. That big room, but we won't put the bed - '

'Do you think I don't know how to do, gel?' said Sophie.

Thursday so as to make sure Shon and Megan went from Merthyr on the train to Liverpool to meet the ship, which didn't come till middle-day Friday. Shon had a cab ready, and good job he did, for Moriah couldn't have walked. Megan and Shon they took her from the two women working on the ship, and Shon gave them a sovereign between 'em, for Moriah said that they had been very good to her. 'Good job somebody have been good to you,' said Megan, nearly crying - 'but I mustn't cry,' she said to herself.

The look of Moriah was enough to make anybody cry though. If you didn't know for sure that it was her, you'd never believe it was Moriah. For she had gone to look awful. Somehow she was thin and wasted inside the fat that was outside, the fat which now was like loose-lumpy fat stuck here and there on the frame of a skeleton - though p'raps that's not what it looked like either. Her face was

not fat at all, but bony and thin. The skin of her face was blotchy red in patches, and she was trembling all over all the time. As soon as she saw Megan she began crying. Cry an' cry she did. 'The old world have done something to you, Moriah fach,' said Megan, holding her up to soothe her.

There was no train for Merthyr till three o'clock that afternoon, which would be late in the night getting to Merthyr. So Shon said that perhaps it would be better them stay in the hotel the night, and go with the first train to Merthyr in the morning. 'No, no, I want to go home with Megan,' Moriah wailed.

'All right, we'll go home no matter what time we reach there,' said Megan.

Shon paid money for them to have a compartment to themselves, and he bought a bottle of brandy in case some was wanted. They put Moriah to lie down along the one seat, her head not on a pillow which Shon fetched from somewhere, but in Megan's lap. She reached her hand back for Megan's hand. She slept after a bit, but it was a funny sleep, a twitching sleep, groaning, crying, saying a word or two, her hot hand all the time gripping Megan's.

'Whatever it is, it's something awful the old world have done to her, Shon,' Megan said, looking down on Moriah's exposed and unguarded face. 'I thought — Is there anything I have been left in the dark about, Shon?'

'No, she's been short of money at times — well, often, but she didn't have to ask twice. I didn't bother to tell you about that.'

'It was none o' my business. But I thought you said that she was getting plenty money by singing?'

'Perhaps I did. Anyway, she wasn't. In all I must have sent her — '

'What a man sends his wife is none o' my business. I told you then, Shon, I told you then that you'd — 'But what good me say that now. Make her better we must now. Since she ran away to you, it's like a shadow she have been

to me. Like a name on the bills they stick about the place. By the look of her, God help her, that Madame Moriana is gone away for ever. She's no longer that shadow but herself, our Moriah, holding fast to my hand. She held my hand fast that night dad was going to beat us with the belt, the night mam — That's nearly twenty-five years ago, Shon.'

'Yes, time flies,' said Shon, looking down at the clasped hands he was pressing between his knees.

'No doubt it goes,' said Megan. 'But as for flying — Listen to her now again,' she said, as Moriah began raving afresh, speaking bits of Italian after bouts of English. Several times she jumped to make Megan hold her to stop her falling off the seat. 'I shall be glad when we get to Merthyr,' Shon said.

'So will I, for her sake more than my own,' said Megan.

Half-past eleven it was when they reached Merthyr, and lucky they were to get a cab. They stopped to knock up Dr. Hughes, who said that he would be up after them. Sophie was waiting for them, and the bed was ready for Moriah. Dr. Hughes when he came looked like doctors do look when looking at someone as bad as Moriah was. 'H'm,' he said after his examination of her. 'Yes — Time she was in bed. Keep her there.' Moriah started muttering and twitching worse than before. 'If you'll come down with me I'll give you something to steady her,' he said, gathering up his few things. 'I shall call here as — Let me see.' He looked down on Moriah. 'Yes, I'd better come and see her before I go to the hospital. I will. Come along,' he said to Shon.

Between 'em all they managed to keep Moriah alive for a week before she was released. Not a wink o' sleep did Megan have that week. Looking at Moriah, listening to her delirious ravings. Megan couldn't make head or tail of what she was all the time saying. Names of places in America; then there was some colonel Moriah all the time talked to. 'Why don't you give me a chance to sing the

role in New York, colonel?' she said till Megan began to try and picture the man. Was he like the colonel of the Merthyr Volunteers? But the colonel of the Merthyr Volunteers never had anything to do with singing. 'Why don't you give me a chance to sing the role in New York, colonel? When it's weeks of travelling I get the role. The Scalchi won't go on tour for you - Then why give her all the roles in New York? Chicago, see what Chicago says about my - my -'

Sometimes Moriah would wake up out of uneasy sleep to smile at Megan. But she could hardly talk, only look. Her mouth was moving trying to say something on towards the evening. Shon was asleep in the chair far side the bed, Sophie was sitting in the chair near the head of the bed same side where Megan was standing bending over Moriah. With a feather dipped in brandy in her hand she bent over Moriah, trying to get her to take a drop o' brandy that way. 'A drop o' brandy won't hurt her, will it, doctor?' she had said earlier in the day. 'No, I don't think so,' said Dr. Hughes. So Megan kept on trying to get Moriah to take brandy off the feather, for her mouth was all the time working like if she wanted something. 'Here, Moriah fach, wet your tongue.'

'You can leave her alone now,' said Sophie. 'Why?' 'Can't you see for yourself?' Moriah's mouth had stopped working like if she wanted something.

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'Let's make sure that I've got my cork,' said Will, feeling in his waistcoat pocket for it. 'Yes, here it is.'

'You an' your cork,' said Susan, getting ready to go with Megan and the children down the street to get the few things. It was Saturday evening, pay-Saturday evening, and Moriah had been buried nearly a year now. Shon had finished going about selling, had sold his business, and was living retired with a housekeeper to look after him in the fine new house above the new hospital - well, overlooking the new hospital, and most of the town as well. All Shon

did now was look after his pony and trap, for old Dan Delaney looked after his garden as well as Megan’s, and between the two old Dan had plenty to do, but Dan had never been afraid of work. ‘You and your cork,’ said Susan.

‘If I don’t look after my cork, who will?’ said Will. Then turning to Megan he said: ‘Three fines in one night she made me pay. Brushing my clothes and let the cork fall out of my pocket. Out I goes to be challenged three times to produce it before I slip back to look for it. Me, the vice-President this year – ’

‘Are you going for me to lock the door?’ said Susan.

‘Yes, go, Will,’ said Megan. ‘An’ mind to keep yourself tidy to-night.’

‘I always keeps myself tidy,’ said Will as he went, hoping to meet members of the Cork Club without their corks, so as to get his own back on someone for the three fines he had had to pay the Saturday before last.

The hauliers Cork Club was strictly confined to hauliers, and the Club’s headquarters was the upstairs long room of The Black Cock public-house. Each pay-Saturday night the members met there to pay their contributions and fines. It was not a ‘benefit society’ like the Foresters, Hearts of Oak, and many others, but a Club for the aristocracy of the pit to meet each other in. The contributions and fines were once a year spent on a faggot supper with free beer an’ ‘bacco.

Dick Pentwyn was this year’s President. With the presidential cork on the table before him, he was in his place behind the table far end the long room of the Black Cock when Will arrived to take his place behind his president. Right and left of the president sat the secretary and treasurer, the treasurer who, in his report, said that there was enough in hand this year for at least two faggot suppers, with free beer an’ ‘bacco for all as in previous years.

‘Why can’t we go somewhere instead?’ cried a Red Vein

haulier. All the others looked at him, and there was murmuring. 'Order,' cried that year's doorkeeper, who was also president's cork-bearer when the president had to leave the room and go down the stairs and out to the back. When the president had to leave for natural reasons, Will came forward from behind to occupy the presidential chair until the president returned. 'Go?' said the President. 'How do you mean go?' The Red Vein haulier said: 'Go to Manchester, worthy President.' Several of those present wanted to know where Manchester was. The Red Vein haulier said that it was a place his wife's brother had gone with a 'scursion to see the fireworks. Fireworks of battles in Belle Vue Gardens there. Wasn't that better than faggot suppers all time? Leave Merthyr with the 'scursion train on the Friday night late, and get to Manchester 'bout the time they're getting up there.

'But that means us losing a short shift,' cried a Black Vein haulier.

'Address yourself to the President,' roared the doorkeeper.

'Fine him,' said the President to the secretary.

'Worthy President,' said the Black Vein haulier after he had paid the fine, 'what is proposed means us giving the benefit of our short Saturday shift to the bosses. Better have a faggot supper same as always. What froice we would be to work the five long shifts from Monday to Friday, then lose the short shift for the bosses to have the laugh on us.'

'Why can't we go on Mabon's Monday if at all, worthy President?' asked a Bute seam haulier.

It was explained that only on Friday nights the excursions for one day went. 'Then it's no good bother,' said the President, as his hand went forward officially to the handle of his pint. Forward hands grasped forty pints half full, to lower them empty. One of the Club's strictest rules was the 'only two drops in a pint' rule, meaning that members had to drink every pint drank during sessions in two swigs. 'Order,' cried the doorkeeper. The President with the heel

of his right boot beat the floor to call the attention of those in the bar below. Soon there was a knock. 'Who knocks?' cried the doorkeeper. 'Servant of the house,' cried someone out on the landing. 'Enter, servant of the house,' said the President. Not a word was spoken whilst the servant of the house – Ned Humphrey, the landlord's brother-in-law, it was – carried the forty empty pints out to helpers on the landing, from where he returned with pints frothing over. When this had been done the servant of the house retired backwards, with the secretary's account chit in his hand.

The servant of the house gone, speech was permissible again. The President stood up to light his pipe from the gas-jet, and when he was seated again the Red Vein haulier addressed him, and through him his fellow-members. 'I'm still of the same mind, worthy President,' he began. 'It's time that as a Club we went somewhere. The sight of a lifetime's to be had in Manchester, my wife's brother said. Not only fireworks, but wild animals as well. If we go, we don't give the bosses the benefit of the short shift on the Saturday. The bosses know that if us hauliers takes the Saturday, we stops the pit. Right. We'll offer to work a shift an' a half on the Thursday, an' a shift an' a half on the Friday; work late on the Thursday night, then go half a shift earlier to work on the Friday morning. Then we'll have our full week in before leaving for Manchester late on the Friday night. An' what's more. We're enough in number to ask the railway for one o' them saloons – an' nobody, only us members, will be 'lowed to ride in it to Manchester. All together, worthy President. An' we can take a drop o' drink tidy with us.'

He stopped as the President's hand went officially forward to his pint. The speaker drank his pint half-way down with the rest. 'This saloon you're talking about,' said Ned Pentwyn, the President. 'Would they 'low us to take a couple o' niners into it to drink on the way?'

'Ay, an' whatever else we like, for it'll be our saloon to take what we like into.'

The proposition was now seen in a more favourable light, and on towards the close of the session, which ended at closing-time, never before, the secretary, treasurer, vice-President and the President were by the members assembled asked to go into the matter, see the station-master at the railway station, the overman at the pit. The station-master said: 'Certainly you can have a saloon, gentlemen.' The overman at the pit said: 'Certainly you can have the day off if you work it beforehand.' He, the overman, had long been wanting a long week-end to do a job that wanted doing in the pit-shaft itself. So it was arranged to everyone's satisfaction. 'I'm going to Manchester next Friday night with the Cork Club,' said Will to Susan when everything had been settled.

'Manchester? Where's that?'

'Up in England.'

'What are you going there for?'

'To see the place, woman, an' to see the fireworks they haves there. Fireworks showing the fighting in India - or is it Egypt?'

'What're you asking me?'

'I wasn't asking you.'

Megan called on her way home from the prayer-meeting. 'He's going to Manchester with the Cork Club Friday night,' said Susan, pointing a thumb at Will asleep in the arm-chair. 'No.' 'But he is, I tell you,' said Susan. 'Will,' shouted Megan to wake him, 'is it true you're going to Manchester Friday night with the Cork Club?' The neighbours in the Row were soon asking each other the same question in different ways. 'Is it true that Will Davies is going all the way to Manchester with the Cork Club, going on the train by night?'

Thursday came, and Will was down the pit sixteen hours on the Thursday. Next day, Friday, another sixteen hours from three in the morning till seven in the evening. It was eight by the time he got home to his taters an' meat, which he was either too tired or excited - p'raps a bit o' both - to

gollup up the hungry way he usually did. When kneeling over the tub stripped to the waist he found his arms he could hardly rise them to wash his head. He had to report with the other members of the Club at The Black Cock by nine o'clock. At last he was washed and dressed in his bit o' best, sham-front, collar an' all. He thought he would have felt better after washing all over, but he still felt as stiff as a post. 'What time will you be back from that place?' said Susan as handing him his bowler-hat. 'Sunday morning sometime.' 'There's two half-crowns under that candle-stick on the mantelpiece that Megan gave for you to have in your pocket. Your eyes are not very clean.'

'They're not,' said Will, after he had pocketed the two half-crowns going to look in the glass. 'I've rubbed an' – Give us a bit o' butter to try.' With a bit o' salt butter on a rag he tried to remove from around his eyes coal-dust sticking so fast after thirty-two hours worked in two shifts, making three, to have one free to travel. 'They'll have to do,' he cried at last. 'I must run not to be fined for being late.'

'Mind to look after yourself,' Susan called after him.

In their headquarters at The Black Cock the hauliers of the deepest pit in the district assembled, all as stiff as could be after handling three shifts coal – approx' three thousand tons in two shifts making three. All dressed in their bit o' best, coal-dust sticking, coal-scars showing. The secretary reported that the landlord of The Black Cock had been a trump. He had stocked the saloon, letting them have the bottles o' short for exactly what he had paid for 'em at the Vaults. The beer, of course, he had had to charge the usual price for, but he had put one nine-gallon cask of Harrap's three XXX in free of charge, and he hoped that members would not open their mouths about that, for the landlord's wife – 'well, you all know what she is' – would if once she got to know, be shouting at the man for being such a good sort. There was no need to leave The Black Cock till stop-tap, for the train don't go till five to twelve.

'So we've got two hours,' said the President, reaching for his pint.

That two hours drinking-time before starting did them all the world o' good. They was all feeling grand as they stood on the platform in groups looking at '*our saloon*'. On the windows of the saloon there were slips which informed everybody that it was reserved for 'THE HAULIERS' CORK CLUB'. Ned Pentwyn, the President, stood on the platform with his eyes fixed on the reserved slip. He was proud to think that this great adventure was being risked during his Presidential year, a year which, he felt certain, would be long remembered. For it was a great adventure. Never before had any one of the forty hauliers been out of Wales - a few only had been on a train before. Now they were going like lords in their own saloon well stocked to *Manchester* - wherever that was. At five minutes to twelve Ned Pentwyn, the President, entered the saloon first by virtue of office. The others followed. 'Take your coats off, lads,' said Ned Pentwyn graciously, as he took his own off. 'All rules suspended.'

In their shirt-sleeves they drank and sang and joked the dark night away, and by dawn they were all so full among the empties, full and fast, fast asleep among the empties. Porters shouted 'Manchester' loudly, but in vain. Too much drink on top of too much work had induced a state of coma in face of which railway officials stood helpless. So the saloon with its passengers was shunted into a siding where those within it slept most of the day away. The first to wake up some time in the afternoon was Ned Pentwyn, the President. Over tangled bodies he crawled to the open window to look about through a fine rain and smoke until he at last thought he could see some big square buildings. He called out to a passing shunter: 'Hoy, butty, how far from here to Manchester?'

'Manchester?' repeated the shunter, 'why, there's Manchester,' he said, pointing with his coupling-hook.

'Boys, we're in Manchester,' cried Ned Pentwyn. 'Come

on, wake up, boys, we’re in Manchester.’ None of them moved, so Ned shouted: ‘Produce – your – corks,’ and that roused them. ‘We’re in Manchester. Get your coats on, boys.’ ‘It’s never that time, is it?’ said one with his watch in his hand. Others looked at their watches, which by agreement convinced their owners that it was that time. ‘Well, I’m damned,’ chuckled Ned Pentwyn. ‘Never mind, it’s raining, so p’raps it’s just as well. Let’s go an’ look for a drink.’

In single file between marshalled goods’ trains they went looking for the station. A friendly foreman shunter led them to it, and handed them over to a friendly foreman porter, who said that he knew all about them. He showed them the platform from where their saloon would be waiting to take them back home that midnight coming; and as luck would have it there was everything bar the fireworks right on that platform. There was a lavatory where they all had a wash and brush-up, and there was also a long and commodious refreshment-room where most friendly barmaids full of their clothes – Ned Pentwyn said: ‘We’re lucky, boys. Let’s all sit together this end.’ After a few rounds o’ drinks they cleared the counters of what food there was on them for sale. ‘Yes, plenty more,’ the friendly barmaids said. ‘Thank you, gels fach,’ said Ned Pentwyn. ‘No doubt,’ he said to his members all around him, ‘one o’ these gels can tell us what the fireworks they’ve got in this place are like, tell us enough to tell them at home. For I doubt if we’d find a better drop o’ beer in this place than they sells here. There’s food to eat, a place to go next door, so what more can any man want. Drink up, lads.’

As soon as it was dark they started singing, quietly at first. The refreshment-room was soon the centre of attraction. Platform staffs and passengers, barmaids, and others from outside the station listened and wondered as the forty half-drunken hauliers sang like if they couldn’t help it. Solos, duets, trios, quartets and choruses and hymns. They

grew less secular as time went on, and for the last half-hour it was all hymns they sang.

Scores of willing helpers helped them into their saloon when it was brought to the door, practically to the door of the refreshment room. Inside the saloon which had since they left been tidied up, they took off their coats. The hymn 'Caersalem' they were singing as the train steamed out, 'Cor Caersalem', they sang, and those crowding the platform didn't laugh. Listened gratefully to the forty almost too drunk to stand hauliers singing Dr. Parry's hymn-tune like if they couldn't help it. Not one on the platform said 'disgraceful state those men are in' or anything like that, for the sound coming from the forty was like the sound of a male voice chorus of angels singing, some of those on the platform thought.

The train it travelled through another night, travelled homewards now, and the death of the night was the birth of the Sabbath, and the forty sleeping their way into it.

As soon as little Shon saw his father coming downstairs to the Sunday dinner he was not feeling much inclined for, little Shon cried: 'Here's our dad now. Tell us what the fireworks in Manchester was like, dad.'

'Grand they was,' said his father.

'How grand was they? Was it fireworks of soldiers fighting like you said?' persisted little Shon. The other boys closed around. 'Ay,' said their father, 'ay, that was it. Soldiers fighting an' —' 'An' what?' said little Shon. 'Haven't I told you?' said his father. 'What sort o' place is Manchester?' Owen, the eldest boy, asked his father. 'Grand place,' said his father. 'How grand?' said little Shon. 'Shut up, an' come to your dinners all of you,' said Susan. Will didn't eat much dinner.

CHAPTER XX

GOING AND COMING

A TWEL'MONTH to the day,' said Megan, sitting with the letter in her hand. 'What day?' said Susan, getting ready to start on her washing. 'The day Sophie was buried.' 'Is it as long as that since she was buried?' said Susan, wondering whether she had better wash two blankets or leave them till Wednesday. 'Yes, she's gone a twel-month,' said Megan. 'Going an' coming it is all time.'

The letter she was holding in her hand was from Edith down Cardiff to say that she would very much like for Megan to come down to stand god-mother to her baby boy at the christening. Nearly four years before Joe and Edith had had their first baby at last. Edith's father was gone, too – an' look what a jolly man he was. Ever so many gone lately. Martha James after making so many look tidy, she was gone, gone leaving her pigs and her donkey and the mothers going to have babies wanting her, and the people dying wanting her to make them look tidy for the neighbours to come an' see them. . . . Martha had left them all. Then Eos Morlais, only last week he went, and look what a fine singer he was. The last time Megan had heard him sing was when she went over to that Eisteddfod in Tredegar, where in the evening concert after the Eisteddfod Eos Morlais sang 'The White Squall' by himself – an' what was that duet he sang with Madame Penn-Williams? Anyway, he's gone now, poor fellow.

But it was Sophie Megan had missed more than any that had gone before or since. Couldn't live in the big old house alone after Sophie had gone an' left her. She had

gone down to Susan's to ask her to move up from the Row to the big old house she was getting afraid of. 'No, I likes my own house,' Susan had said at first. But when Megan pointed out how small it was for them all now that three of the boys were working an' all, Susan said she'd see. Before the night was out she said, 'All right, then.'

Since then Megan had been like a lodger in her own house, for Susan, in her half-soaked way, did what she liked, and when she liked, without asking Megan's permission, or consulting her in the least. Susan carried on like if it was her own house.

Still, Megan was glad o' the bit o' company, glad of the youngest children to go to the circus with about twice a week. The circus which they called a 'Family Circus' had settled down in Merthyr, an' Megan was glad that it had, for without the circus a couple o' times in the week, and John Thomas to listen to a couple o' times most Sundays, it would have been off her head she would have gone without Sophie. There were times even now when she went to feel very low, and Susan, who had little patience with people feeling low all time, said to Will: 'Your Megan's no doubt suffering from the change o' life. I've got plenty to do without listening to her talking about feeling low all time. Why didn't she stick to the choir to go about singing with it. She'd have had company if nothing else. . . .'

But Megan didn't have the heart to go about singing with the choir after Sophie had gone. Now she was sitting with the letter in her hand saying: 'No, I don't think I'll go down Cardiff to the christening. Let 'em get somebody else for god-mother.'

'They won't like it if you don't go,' said Susan.

'I don't care.'

'Well, I must go to my washing,' said Susan. 'But I'm bound to tell you one thing, Megan. If you lets yourself go like you are, it's go like old Marged Ellis you will before long. She only came alive to gather rent a day a week, an' that's how you're going, too. I should be 'fraid o' my

heart to go like that. Better go on the train to Cardiff, an' stay there with your Joe a couple or three days. But there, you knows,' Susan said as she went out the back-kitchen to give a pile of clothes the first of the two waters she was going to put them through. Megan sat where she was with the letter from Cardiff in her hand.

She made up her mind to go that same afternoon, and she stood god-mother for the baby boy named after Edith's father, and she stayed down in Cardiff with Joe and Edith from the Tuesday to the Saturday, when she told Edith she was bound to go back home to be there ready for chapel on Sunday morning. 'For I goes to Zoar three times every Sunday,' she told Edith.

Joe found time on the Saturday to come with Edith as far as the station to 'send' Megan. It was little Megan had seen of Joe during the four days. She had seen him at the church the day of the christening of his son, and she was seeing him now. Joe was a big man now, a responsible man. He and Edith's brother were now the two head men of the firm that Edith's father had been the head man of up to the time he died, leaving Edith as much money as he left to her brother. Edith's mother - Edith told Megan that she had gone very low too - had gone to live with that Aunt Amy in Appledore, Devonshire. Joe and Edith they now lived in the tall house Megan had stayed at that time when Joe and Edith were married. Joe was getting grey over the ears, and wrinkly about the eyes. He didn't travel down to his offices down the docks on the train, but in his carriage and pair, with a box-hat on his head, and gloves and a stick in his hand when he was sitting down in the carriage. He was in London two of the days Megan was there, for his firm had an office and connections in London, so Edith told Megan. 'He works very, very hard,' Edith said. 'So much he has to attend to. I'm hoping to get him away to the Continent for a month or so away from it all.'

Thinking of that and other things Megan was looking at

Joe who had come as far as Cardiff station with Edith to 'send' her. Joe was looking away to the right towards the docks, leaving Edith and Megan to talk. Of freights he thought, standing like one too big for little things such as sisters and wives. Ships and cargoes and stocks and shares left him with but little time to think of family connections. But wasn't he working for them? Of course he was. He was, he was fond of telling himself, also working for Cardiff, working to make it one of the world's greatest ports, a great city, a - 'Eh?'

'Isn't this Megan's train?' said Edith.

'Is it? - yes, this is it,' he said as a train with names on steamed in. On the boards it said 'MERTHYR' on one, and 'PONTYPRIDD' on another, and on another 'ABERDARE'. Then the men were walking the platform shouting: 'Pontypridd, Rhondda and Aberdare valleys and Merthyr train.' Then some would have to change at Pontypridd, and others at the Junction higher up. Then they would each go between the hills to their own valleys, the valleys for which Joe in Cardiff was a sort of receiver. 'Remember me to Will and Susan,' he cried, waving his box-hat as the train left.

In less than a week after the christening in Cardiff there was a letter from America to say that another baby had come to the family out there. 'Well, well, well, well,' said Megan after she had read the letter to Will and Susan. Then after a bit she said: 'What if I went out to see them in America?' 'Nothing to stop you that I knows of,' said Susan. 'My chapel,' said Megan. 'Plenty Welsh chapels out there,' said Will. 'You'll never go younger,' said Susan. Megan considered this. 'No, will I?' Then she stood up to reach for her shawl off the back of the arm-chair. 'See what Shon says,' she said as going out.

Up to Shon's big house she went. Dan Delaney was cutting the grass in front, and when asked where Shon was he pointed around the corner of the house. 'In the stable shining that pony of his up,' chuckled Dan. Around to the

stable Megan went, an' there was Shon, with his braces down like an ostler's, and the fatness of his stomach straining the waist of his trousers. He was almost breathless from his labours, which were light enough, for it was combing the pony's mane he was when Megan looked in. 'I want to talk to you,' she said. 'Won't be a minute. Go in the house an' sit down.' 'No, here'll do. I'm thinking about going to see them out in America.' 'What?' he cried, leaving the pony's mane to come out to her. 'I am,' she said. 'Right, I'll come with you,' he said. 'What for?' 'To look after you, of course.' 'I can look after myself.' 'Then for a jaunt. Surely I'm entitled to a jaunt now?' 'Have your jaunt when I'm not going, then.' 'But are you going? or are you only joking?' 'I'm not joking – an' I wouldn't mind you coming with me a bit. But if you go, then I can't go. For it's you I'm looking to to gather my bit o' rent, an' to get what wants doing done to my houses. No good leave it to Will or Susan, for it's as dull as bats the two of 'em are. But you knows about houses an' 'counts.'

'Yes,' said Shon, smoothing his pony's rump as he considered Megan. 'All right,' he said at last. 'I'll be your rent-man while you're away.' He gave the pony a parting pat before closing the stable door. 'Let's go and have some tea,' he said, leading the way into the house through the back way.

'Hullo, stranger,' said old Ellen Peters, Shon's house-keeper.

'What do you think, Ellen?' said Shon.

'What?'

'She's made up her mind to go to America.'

'Never.'

'She has. Shall she have a cup o' tea?'

'An' welcome,' said old Ellen.

Megan threw her shawl over the back of a chair before sitting down. 'I don't know for sure if I'll go now.'

'You'll go,' said Shon. 'Never spoil a good mind.'

'All that way first on the train, then on the ship. . . .'

'It'll do you good. I'll arrange everything. I'll go as far as Liverpool with you, and I'll write to ask Llew' or 'Lias to meet the boat in New York. You'll be all right. In one way I'm glad you've made up your mind to go, in another — I shall miss you, Megan fach. But you need a change. Then again, Llew' an' 'Lias are getting on. So's Norah, and Miriam.'

'Yes, that's what I was thinking.'

'Come to this cup o' tea,' said old Ellen Peters.

Next day Megan was rounding the shops for clothes to fill the trunk Shon went with her to the saddler's shop to buy. Some clothes she bought in The Temple Of Fashion, others in the Cloth Hall — and she bought a few things in the Manchester House as well. From Oliver's just above Zoar Chapel she bought boots and a pair of soft shoes to walk the deck of the ship. So she had everything ready to go long before the ship was ready to go.

But the day came; and as luck would have it, Shon, who was going as far as Liverpool with Megan, Shon heard two men on the platform talking about the *Etruria*, which was the ship he had booked Megan's passage on. Shon spoke to the two men, and they said 'yes', they were going to America on the *Etruria* too. Then Shon gave them a cigar apiece, and introduced them to Megan, leaving her to talk to them whilst he went back to change the train tickets from third to first, for the two gentlemen were travelling first. One of them was from Tredegar, the other from Dowlais. The one from Tredegar had been to America once before, he said, and now he was going out there again to see 'the steel plants', as he called them, which, so he said, were putting the steelworkers of South Wales out o' work by selling too cheap. 'Too cheap,' thought Megan, sitting in the corner by the open window not to swallow too much of the three men's cigar smoke, 'how can things be too cheap?' The gentleman from Tredegar was taking his cigar out of his mouth to explain to Shon. 'We

in Tredegar look like having to close down owing to it,' he said. 'For the Americans are shipping their steel bars over here to sell at less than it costs us to make 'em at Tredegar. American steel bars to be had at four-pound-ten a ton. How much longer can we keep our works going in face of that? Just think, four-pound-ten a ton.'

'We must modernise our plants, that's all,' said the man from Dowlais, who was a works manager, too. The next thing he said as the train was slowing down on the way into some station was: 'I wonder if there'll be time for a drink here?' Megan said no thank you when asked to go with them into the refreshment room, from where they returned with fresh cigars in their mouths, and Shon carrying a cup o' tea and a cake in a paper-bag for Megan.

'Modernise our plants?' the Tredegar man said. 'I agree. When I returned from America in eighty-eight, I told our people then – but would they listen? I could see this coming. After a talk with Bill Jones, who made Pittsburgh – yes, and made Carnegie and the rest of 'em millionaires. Bill Jones told me then, in eighty-eight, the year before he was killed, Bill Jones told me –'

'There you are, another Welshman,' the Dowlais man said.

'Can you put that window your side down a bit,' said Megan, who was coughing.

'Certainly,' said the Dowlais man, sticking the cigar he was holding into his mouth so as to have his hands free to lower the window. As he sat down he said: 'Bill Jones, the greatest iron and steel man America ever had, or ever will have. America can thank Wales for him, and scores of thousands of other Welshmen who've made the American steel industry. You say that you saw it coming in eighty-eight? Why, that's only yesterday, as you might say. But when I was a youngster, Henry Bruce, long before he was made first Lord Aberdare, was telling us in Merthyr and Dowlais about this coming. For in the fifties and the sixties our best men were running off to America.'

'And weren't they running from Tredegar as well, and haven't they been running from there ever since?'

Shon ventured to remark that no doubt all the places along the South Wales and Monmouthshire industrial belt had contributed their quotas of skill and industry towards the building up of American industry; and Megan in the corner was thinking that if the two Shon had asked to look after her on the ship talked on the ship like they were now talking on the train, and blowing cigar smoke to make her cough all time, then she'd take care to keep out o' their way.

But, fair-play for 'em, they were like a couple of boys on holiday from the minute the boat left Liverpool. One of 'em – the Dowlais one – could play the piano Megan was surprised to find on the ship. She was surprised by everything on the ship, let alone the piano. Now nearer fifty than forty, and all the time going about the ship between the two steel men saying: 'Well, well, well, well....' She didn't have to do any of the things Shon told her. She was sea-sick, for the reason that she was not. The ocean was a tonic to her. The man from said 'never', when she told him her right age – 'gone forty-five now'.

Two other men took charge of her in New York, two oldish men through whose age she could see the two young colliers who had, when she was small, taken her and Moriah across the bridge and out to where the shops were 'to buy'. It was Moriah 'Lias had liked more than me, but Llew' he liked me more than Moriah. And here they are now, and here am I with them in America. Gone to look old the two of 'em have, but Llew' an' 'Lias they are all time. 'Don't cry, mustn't cry,' she said to them. They would cry, seeing their mother when in her short-lived prime in their ocean-rejuvenated middle-aged sister. In the station waiting for the train to Scranton, they sat, the three of 'em, Llew' holding her one hand, 'Lias the other, she answering first the one, then the other. Question after question. 'Awful lot o' blacks about here,' said Megan, when Llew'

left her with 'Lias to go and see the coloured men put Megan's luggage right.

'Wait — just wait till you see the crowd in Scranton,' her brothers said more than once, as the train so funny to Megan hurried to get them there. The American side of the family had all come to welcome her from the half-dozen States it had by now through marriage spread into. All come to Scranton to welcome bopa Megan, who was, in a way, the founder of the American side of the family, for if she hadn't had the money to lend Llew' an' 'Lias about twenty years ago all these people might have sprung up the other side the water, where Susan's children had come to be.

'This is *our* Megan, bopa Megan,' said Norah, leading a lovely little gel about the age of Susan's Megan forward. 'And this is *our* Moriah,' said Miriam, the grandmother so fat, as bringing her daughter's little gel forward. 'Moriah, is it?' said Megan tremulously, not wanting to cry before 'em all, an' trying hard not to, but with one arm around a Megan, and the other around a Moriah, one dark and the other fair like we was, she had to let go — couldn't help it, old fool as I am. For this Moriah like our Moriah was with eyes like black buttons an' hair the colour of blackberries. . . .

It had been arranged for her to sleep an' eat week about, a week in Norah's, a week in Miriam's, every other till it was time for her to go home. Then the man from Minnesota married to Miriam's eldest said that they wanted her on his farm in Minnesota — wherever that was — for a week or so, and the others married an' gone to live away from their parents in other States wanted her where they lived for a week or so. Farmers now in the family, thought Megan, asking 'when do you think I'm going home then if I round you all for a week at a time?'

'You're not going back home this year,' said Llew'.

'Indeed I am.'

Miriam had another daughter getting married in what

she called 'the fall', and it was no use Megan talking about going back home before then. Then 'Lias said that in September there would be the Cymrodorion International Eisteddfod at the World's Fair in Chicago.

'September?' cried Megan. 'I'll be gone long before then, for our National Eisteddfod is at Pontypridd in August, an' I may sing with the choir there. So don't talk about keeping me here till September, there's good people.'

'Well, we'll see,' said Norah, the so efficient and lady-like one, who had been seeing to supper that was like some huge tea-party in the two big rooms downstairs of Norah's fine house. After supper they went in a body over to Miriam's fine house, which was quite as big, though not quite as well-kept as Norah's. They was there talking for goodness knows how long before Miriam and her daughters they put a second supper which everybody was made sit down to whether they wanted to or not. It was morning-time they was eating a second supper in. 'I'll sure to be bad,' said Megan to them one after the other, wanting her to try a bit o' this and that.

In a laughing body back to Norah's again, the children by this time put to bed in both their houses. What time is it then? Megan wanted to know. What odds about the time, they all said. See you first thing in the morning, said Miriam an' 'Lias as they were leaving with the lot that was going to sleep over at their house. 'The first thing in this morning is gone,' laughed Megan, then they all laughed before starting to talk again. They went at last, an' good night it was then, 'good night, bopa Megan', from 'em all, an' Norah so lively and efficient and lady-like showing Megan to her bed. Then when only them two was together in the room in which Megan was to sleep, Norah she stopped being lively and efficient and lady-like. "Twas you closed her eyes for me, Megan. Tell me. Think of all she said for me. I've waited so long to hear you. . . ."

In the twinkling of an eye they were back in the little

upstairs room of the little house in Penydarren over the water. Megan's mind unpent remembering the words of Peg Delaney, and her daughter Norah Delaney ready with tears of consecration for every so precious second-hand word. 'Oh, mother o' mine....' The light of yet another new day had started working its passage through the debris of yet another night before Norah satisfied left Megan to get what sleep she could. Next morning Norah was as lively, efficient and lady-like as ever, and only Megan knew the woman of tears of the hours before.

To Philadelphia they went to see the shops and listen to a concert, and to – but where didn't they go altogether? It was off somewhere every day they took Megan. Off to where one or the other of her married nieces and nephews lived with their husbands and wives and children. Again she went with Norah and Miriam and Nancy, Miriam's daughter, to buy clothes for Nancy to get married in. Talk about fine shops – An' the hotel where they had food in the restaurant before going to cetch the train back to Scranton. Yes, grand shops in Philadelphia there was.

Again they came from everywhere – bringing the children with 'em – to Scranton for Nancy's wedding to the man with whom she was going to some place in Wisconsin to live. Megan thought he was a fine young man, but he couldn't speak Welsh, neither could he speak English very well. A Swede or something like that he was, they told Megan, but whatever he was, he was the handsomest young man Megan had ever in her life seen anywhere. They was married in the Welsh chapel in Scranton, the chapel of which Llew' an' Lias were two deacons. The preacher had to marry them in English for the chap Nancy was marrying to understand.

When Nancy went with her husband to Wisconsin, Miriam, her mother, cried like anything. 'There, there,' said Megan, 'she's not gone over the water away from you.' About a month later the gel and her husband came to

Chicago to meet her mother and the rest of the family, and you'd think by the way Miriam fell on the gel's neck and cried that the gel had been gone from her years instead of only a month.

Of course, they had their way with Megan. Stay for this, stay for that, and now here she was with 'em all in Chicago for the massing of the Welsh in America at the World's Fair for the Cymrodorion International Eisteddfod, which made Chicago for a week look and sound like a city in Wales over the water. For the place seemed full of Welsh people the week Megan was there. When she left the hotel, it was to hear people speaking Welsh on every corner in the place, an' as for the Festival Hall in the World's Fair — an' there's a place if you like — well, in the Festival Hall it was like being at the National Eisteddfod at home.

The great old Caradog was there to conduct the Eisteddfod choir, an' Megan could hardly believe that it was twenty-one years since she had sang under him in the Cor Mawr at the Crystal Palace in London. Moriah was learning herself to sing then with her share of old bopa Lloyd's money. . . . 'Well, well. . . .' Ben Davies an' Mary Davies that she heard singing in Merthyr National Eisteddfod that time, here from home to sing now in Chicago. Who'd think this was America? she asked herself after the Eisteddfod sessions and evening concerts. The crowd leaving the Festival Hall of the World's Fair, an' nearly everybody talking Welsh like if it was Wales. Llew' told her no wonder either, for there was a million and a quarter Welsh people now in America. 'No doubt,' she said, not knowing — an' not liking to ask — how much people was in a million and a quarter.

The family had a block of seats in what 'Lias called 'the dollar circle', and it was from her seat in the circle she saw him standing in front of one of the twenty-five-dollar boxes. Everybody was standing to clap Ben Davies for singing so well, when Megan like a fool murmuring, 'I'm sure I know

that man,' left her place unobserved to go an' see if it was him. By the time she got around to the back of the boxes, the choir under Caradog had started to sing *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, and all the people in the Festival Hall joined in. So did Megan from where she stood behind the box she had been making for. The song of Wales, which the two Pontypridd weavers had made for Wales so long ago, now filled the Festival Hall to spill over, glorious falls of sound, into the World's Fairground of Chicago. Evan James and James James, weavers, father and son, in Pontypridd in Wales made one the words and the other the tune now being sung by thousands in Chicago. Twenty thousand voices led by Dan Bach had sung it in Pontypridd not so long ago in honour of the two weavers who made it for Welsh people wherever they are to sing themselves back home with. *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, in English *The Land Of My Fathers*, gloriously being sung by the Welsh of America massed at Chicago. Not all the Welsh of America singing at Chicago now, but representatives of all the Welsh-American communities in all the States were there to sing it for themselves and for those who had not been able to come to Chicago to sing it themselves. Dan Bach leading a mighty choir home in Pontypridd, Caradog leading Welsh-America in Chicago. Gold, silver, rich garments, kings and kingdoms, peoples and principalities, industries and inventions, rusting, rotting, passing, and the song in which the two Welsh weavers clothed gloriously the soul of Wales goes round and round the world and through the years undying, imperishable, incorruptible, immortal. . . .

Megan singing with the rest, and after the last refrain she moved forward from behind the box to pull the man's coat. 'You can't sing *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, but, fair play for you, you did stand up out of respect. An' well you could, Tim,' she said.

The big man with two young ladies and a young man in the box with him turned to glare at the woman who had pulled his coat and spoken so familiarly. Like a magistrate

looking at the man before him for drunk and disorderly, he looked at Megan. 'I beg your pardon, but —'

'No need to beg my pardon, Tim bach — but don't you know me this time again?'

'Madam, I don't know you, neither do I want to.'

Megan laughing like a fool and saying: 'Funny how I know you every time, an' you not knowing me.'

'Con,' the big man said to the young man in the box with him, 'call the —'

'Never mind calling anybody, Tim bach,' said Megan. 'Same you was that day in the Workhouse when you came to take your mother, God help her, out o' there. But she wouldn't go for you. Then when you seen me —'

'It is,' roared Tim Murphy dressed like a lord, jumping at her to take her two hands in his. 'I'm the blindest —' Then the soft old thing kissed her before picking her up off the ground to plant her down before the two astonished young ladies. 'This is her — kiss her, Bridget, an' you, Mary. For this is her who never forgot me old mother. This is her I was telling you about many's the time — an' me like a fool not knowing her I've asked many a blessing for. . . .' And a lot of old softness like that he talked till Megan said she had to go before they'll think I'm lost or something. Then there were explanations. Now Megan learned that the two young ladies with him were his two motherless daughters, and that the young man was going to marry one of 'em — he did say which. The people were leaving the Festival Hall, an' Megan from the box could see Llew' an' Lias in the circle looking about. 'Here I am up here,' she cried, waving her hand. 'Come up here all of you — or p'raps better us come down. Stay by there till we come.'

Then there was some talk an' shaking hands. As they went out in a body the policemen standing about they rose their hands to Tim Murphy, who wanted them all to come in carriages he had sent the young man he called Con for. 'Come down as far as my place,' he said. 'All of you.'

'But we're like a regiment of soldiers, Tim bach,' said Megan. 'Come along all of you for old times' sake,' he said. 'Eh, Norah?' he said. 'I'll send across to the hotel and fix things so . . .'

Go they had to in the carriages waiting ready now, so many carriages it was like a May-day show in the night. Down past the big lake like a sea they went, to a house like Cyfarthfa Castle at home, where servants, men and women, waited on 'em hand and foot, and if they had listened to Tim Murphy they would have been there till now. 'Stay a few days,' he begged. 'I've room and to spare for all of you.' His two daughters supported their father's appeal. But how could they stay? Megan's ship, the same ship she came out on, was leaving New York on the Wednesday, and not even for Tim Murphy, now such a big man in Chicago, would she miss that ship. After food set on the biggest table Megan had ever seen, Tim showed Norah and Megan the upstairs of his grand house. From one of the big windows on a landing big enough to make Megan say, 'Well, well, well, well,' Tim pointed out to the grounds in which the house itself stood. Different sorts of gardens under moonlight, and a fountain spouting water up all time. 'It's a long way from Company Row in Penydarren to by here, Tim bach,' said Megan quietly. 'It's as long as we choose to make it,' he said, not turning his head. He had showed them the painting of his dead wife which was hung on top of the first part of the stairway before you had to turn right to climb the other half. 'A fine woman,' Tim said she was. 'No doubt,' Megan said.

The carriages were waiting to take them back to their hotel, Tim riding in the first with Norah and Megan, him all the time saying how he had wished that he had known that they were in Chicago. Had he known, it would have been at his house they would have stayed, not in any hotel. 'Norah,' he said, 'do me a favour. Many's the time me mother went bare-footed to ask bread for us from your mother. She was never refused, or troubled for it back.'

Then this your sister-in-law didn't miss a week taking herself and the smoke o' 'bacca to me mother when in the union. So you'll do me this favour. Promise me?"

'What is it, Tim?"

'Nothing that'll cost you or any o' yours anything. Promise me?"

'Oh, all right. What is it?"

'Let me square your hotel bill - now, don't say no. Had I known that you were here there would have been no hotel bill. I've plenty, an' it's no more than a copper of what I'm owing the pair o' you I'm offering. What do you say?"

'I'm afraid my husband won't -'

'You leave Llew' to me,' said Megan, practical in such a matter for the first time in her life. 'We're not beggars, Tim bach, but this that you're offering is only what any of us would do for you the other side the water if it was wanted. Yes, you pay for the hotel, Tim bach. P'raps your mind will change when you see how much it'll be.'

'No fear,' he said. Llew' an' 'Lias didn't like him doing it, but Megan an' Norah said that if it would please Tim who had plenty, then why rob him of the pleasure? So Tim paid. He was at the railway 'depot', as them out there called it, with his two daughters, to see them off next morning. 'It's not likely that we'll see each other again,' he said to Megan, holding her hand. 'Let me hear you say Tim bach again.'

'Good-bye, Tim bach,' she said, seeing his mother Bridget in his face. It was all good-byes for the next few painful days before she left Scranton for New York, where the last good-byes she said to Llew' an' 'Lias. They two was the worst. Megan thought she had finished crying in Scranton. Now these two boys getting on for sixty years of age started breaking her heart afresh with their sighing an' sobbing. 'No, never again will I come,' she sobbed between them, 'for I couldn't bear it. The more we do meet, the more we got to part. Leaving Norah an' Miriam

in Scranton was worse than dying – yes, worse than dying, tell them that from me when you go back.' She pulled the two elderly men close into her sides. 'Of course you're going back to them, back to them who're more to you than ever I could be – an' you're more to them than ever I could be too. And you'll be together in Scranton before this night's out. Together. Boys, bach, this is your side of the water now for as long as you'll be.' Pointing towards the ship she said: 'Over there my side the water is.' She lowered her head back between her shoulders to face the sky. 'But that up there will always be over your side an' mine, boys bach. So never mind the water between us. That up there over us all. . . . So we mustn't cry, must we? Thank – thank you for coming to "send" me. Better go now. Don't look back as you go, Llew' – nor you, 'Lias bach. Look up now an' then. Go – go quick now like – like I told you – quick. . . .'

She seemed to shrink as she turned and hurried away from them, and they hurried inland batting the tears away from their eyes. The sooner they got back to Scranton to Norah and Miriam the better. And it was a good job for Megan that she was going home on the same boat she came out on, for some of the officers remembered her as soon as they saw her, and they soon made her feel at home. Then there were many of the singers who had come from Wales to sing at the World's Fair Eisteddfod on the ship as well. Llew Ebbw was on the ship – and a number of other singers who with Llew Ebbw gave a concert on the ship the night before it reached Liverpool in the morning early. Early or not, Shon was there to meet it – an' wasn't Megan glad to see him there with his hands in his overcoat pockets an' his cigar in his mouth. 'Shon.' 'Megan fach, you're looking grand. . . .'

They had a cup o' tea an' a bit to eat in the refreshment room in the railway station before the train went at half-past seven. 'News, news,' she wanted from him all the way home. The first news was that there had been a strike

whilst she was away, a hauliers' strike – he hadn't bothered to tell her anything about it in his letters – 'So they've started striking again, have they?' she murmured. 'About five weeks they were out – been back a fortnight now. An' who do you think was marching at the head of the Merthyr hauliers from Merthyr all the way down to the Rocking Stone at Pontypridd?' 'Our Will, was it?' 'No, but that boy of his.' 'Owen, do you mean?' Shon laughed and nodded his head. 'Yes, a regular haulier he is. Talks at the meetings –' 'He ought to have his behind warmed. I always said that Will an' Susan have been too half-soaked with them boys – she more'n him.' 'Behind warmed?' Shon chuckled. 'Owen's soon getting married.' 'Married?' 'Well, he's eighteen, isn't he?' 'Is he?' 'Isn't he, then?' 'P'raps he is indeed. Who's the gel? Do I know her?' 'Of course you do. Bronwen Rees's gel from down the Row.' 'She's never eighteen.' 'Not far from it, Susan said. Only a few months between 'em, she said.' 'Where are they going to live? Did Susan say?' 'No, she didn't say, but she's been paying the rent on one of your houses that went empty on the British Tip – that old woman selling taffy died not long after you went to America. Susan is hoping you'll let Owen have that little house.' 'Yes, let him have it an' welcome. But fancy him getting married too. Well, well, well, well – Did you go to Pontypridd for the National?'

'Only the day of the Chief Choral competition. The Rhymney choir under John Price won it like winking. Talk about your Dan bach an' that old choir of yours,' he concluded jokingly.

'Merthyr under Dan bach have won its share, p'raps more than ever Rhymney will win under John Price,' she said childishly. 'Never mind, Merthyr can't always win.' Then after a bit she said: 'Old Ellen Peters still 'tending to you all right?' 'Yes, old Ellen's all right, as good as a mother to me. Now suppose you tell me what you've been doing, and where you've been in America.'

'Shon bach, if I started I'd never finish. I've been — I don't know where I've been altogether. Chicago, of course . . .'

She was still telling him when the train reached Merthyr about half-past one in the afternoon. 'Shon,' she said as soon as she stepped down out of the compartment on to the platform. 'Tell 'em to send all my things up on the truck to my house to Susan. I want to go up the Cefn before going anywhere.' 'The Cefn?' said Shon. She nodded her head. 'In a cab right up to the gates I want to go before going anywhere. I want them to know I'm back.' 'H'm,' said Shon, going to give instructions about Megan's luggage. That attended to he walked with her out to the cab-rank. 'It's fine enough for a hansom,' he said, beckoning one.

It was a lovely end of September day, and Megan sat in the hansom gorging herself on familiar sights and sounds. 'Merthyr, dear old Merthyr,' she said every now an' then. Slow the hansom cab went uphill through Cefn to the gates of the cemetery, where they got out. 'Wait here,' Shon told the cabby. Into the lovely cemetery they went smiling, Shon and Megan, she wanting them to know that she was back. 'Here I am,' she said first to her mother and father. Moriah she went to next. Shon had had a lovely stone put at Moriah's head, and little railings from the stone down to her feet. Flowers inside the railings. 'Here we are, Moriah fach. Shon an' me have come.' Shon stood with his hat in his hand, the sun shining on the ageless wig he wore on his head. Had anyone spoken to him just then he would have had to swallow what was in his throat before he could have answered. Now over to where Sophie was lying Megan went. 'Here I am, Sophie annwyl. Back again I am.' Presently she turned to Shon. 'Let's go across to where the two boys are,' she said. Now that her two brothers' widows had married again Megan had taken them back into the family she had lying in the Cefn. Standing between the two graves she said: 'Here I am, boys

bach.' Not a tear did she shed over one of her graves, for it was more glad than otherwise she was to be back with them all. As looking up she remarked to Shon: 'The leaves are falling. "The fall" is what them in America do say.' In the distance, over where the Catholics were sleeping together, she saw the figure of a man stooped over a grave. 'If I'm not mistaken that's Dan Delaney over there 'tending to Peg's place. Yes, it is Dan. Must let Peg an' him know that I'm back.'

Dan, with a mason's trowel, was tidying Peg's place up a bit. 'Oh, so you're back,' he said, smiling when he saw that it was Megan. 'How did you find them all in America?'

'Grand. Norah told me – but I'll tell you everything up in Shon's house to-night. You've got Peg's place looking lovely now.' 'Yes,' said Dan, "tis getting to look better.' Megan said: 'If you've finished you can ride home in the cab with us. Oh, no, it's one o' them hansoms we've got.' Dan said: 'Tis no matter, for I'm taking a look at the Murphys' place before going.'

'Then we'll walk as far as the Murphys' place with you,' said Megan, speaking as though it were the 'place' of people still alive. As walking along she told Dan what a big man Tim Murphy was out in Chicago these days. 'The boy had it in him,' said Dan. 'No doubt,' said Megan. 'All the same, I never thought to see the day when plicemen would be calling Tim Murphy "Mr. Murphy", for that's what they called him the night when he took us all in carriages to his big house in Chicago.'

Megan and Shon left Dan on his knees tidying up the Murphys' place. At Susan's the three youngest of Susan's children told their bopa Megan that the circus had gone, worse luck. Nothing there now. But there was Christy Minstrels in the Drill Hall this week, and – 'Yes, I know,' said Megan. 'We'll be there before the week's out.' Susan their mother looking as half-soaked as ever – thank God for her. Will not home from work yet. 'Have a cup o' tea with the children before they come in from work,' said

Susan. 'Have the man from the station brought my things up, Susan?' 'Yes, they're up in your room. Sit an' have a cup o' tea, Shon.' 'I've got a present for you from Norah, an' one from Miriam in the trunk, Susan.' 'An' what have you brought us, bopa?' cried the children. 'I haven't forgot you.'

She sipped a cup o' Susan's tea. 'Oh, it's grand to be home.' 'It's done you the world o' good by the look o' you,' said Susan. The children crying for more bread an' butter, and talking about the Christy Minstrels in the Drill Hall, it was all so fresh again. Shon had left before Will and his three sons came home from the pit, Owen the eldest as old, if not older in his ways than his father. But Megan had a glimpse of the boy he had been when his mother said: 'Your bopa Megan is a-willing for you an' Jane to have the house, Owen.' Then he smiled and said: 'I knew bopa Megan would let us have it.' 'Of course you shall have it,' Megan said, feeling strangely shy in the young man's presence. That evening when Susan brought the tub for them, Will and the three boys, to wash all over, she left the room to walk as far as Shon's, where she had promised to meet Dan Delaney. But she needn't have gone so soon, and she wouldn't have gone so soon had it not been that she could no longer look upon the naked body of the young man soon to be married. Women who like herself had for many years washed the naked backs of their naked brothers and nephews kneeling in the tub didn't as a rule feel squeamish about it at Megan's time o' life. But Owen was soon going to live with another woman, and – well, whatever it was she couldn't have sat there whilst he washed himself all over, no, not if you had crowned her. She went up to Shon's house.

Boxing Day Owen was married to Jane in Zoar Chapel by John Thomas, and after the bit of jollification Megan left the house to walk with Shon as far as his house. Her rheumatic had come back again; and Shon had to stop every now and then to catch his breath, for it was uphill

all the way to his house. He leaned against the railings of the hospital to cetch his breath. 'There you are,' he said, 'another couple married.' 'Yes. Good luck to 'em, say I.' After a bit Shon said: 'We two couldn't get married if we wanted to.' 'Married?' 'We've got money. . . .' 'Humph, money.' 'And sense by now, I hope. Yet we can't get married.' 'Come,' she said, moving off. 'If we've got sense, why talk about getting married? I've got rheumatic - an' you've got to stop every whipstitch to cetch your breath. What time is this to talk about getting married?' 'Perhaps the best time.' 'An' who's talking about getting married? Not me, I'm sure.' 'I said that we couldn't get married if we wanted to. For you being Moriah's sister - ' 'Talking on the road for everybody to hear - come if you're coming.' 'I'm coming as fast as I can.'

Slowly up the hill towards his house they went, she grumbling about him riding about in the trap an' smoking cigars all time till he didn't have breath to walk like another man. 'Sit there an' get your breath now,' she said, pushing him into the arm-chair as soon as they reached his house. Ellen Peters as soon as they came started putting tea, and whilst they were having tea, Ellen having gone to see her daughter living over on the Brecon Road, Megan suddenly rose from her chair to lift Shon's wig off his head. 'What are you doing?' he said. With the wig in her hand she stood looking at him. 'I'm trying to see if I can see you like I seen you that morning in Aberdare,' she said. 'And I can too. Same Shon you are.' She covered his baldness with the wig. 'No, Shon bach, we can't get married, but I'll look to you for as long as you'll be. We'll see each other every day, God willing, and on Sundays we'll go together to Zoar. Won't we?'

'Ay, as well go there as anywhere,' said Shon.

'Better go there than anywhere,' said Megan. 'Have some more tea before you start smoking another cigar.' Shon passed her his cup and saucer.

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